PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 319

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
9 November—19 November 1998

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9 November 1998

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 319**

TWENTY SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 9 November 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Royal Opera House

2. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): What discussions he has had with Sadler's Wells over the impact of the decision to close the Royal Opera house. [57241]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth): I met representatives from Sadler's Wells, the Arts Council of England and the London Arts Board on 23 September. All parties agreed that Sadler's Wells should not suffer as a result of the Royal Opera house board's closure strategy.

Mr. Randall: I thank the Minister for his reply. Following those discussions, can he give any assurances on the long-term job security of the employees, especially the musicians and the artists of the Royal Ballet and Royal Opera house, given that they are the innocent victims of mismanagement and the gross ineptitude of his Department?

Mr. Howarth: No one disputes the artistic excellence of the ballet and opera at the Royal Opera house over the years, but it is widely acknowledged that the standard of management has not been what it should have been. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that primary responsibility for that must rest with the management, although some industrial practices have perhaps not been conducive to cost efficiencies.

The new board and the unions have addressed these issues realistically. I congratulate and thank them for that and I believe that the way is now open to secure the prospects of those who work at the Royal Opera house and create its artistic excellence. When it opens at the end of next year, the new house will be one of the most exciting and advanced venues for lyric theatre in the world, so we have much to look forward to.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): Will the Minister confirm that he has complete and unqualified confidence in the present chairman of the Royal Opera house?

Mr. Howarth: Certainly I do. Sir Colin Southgate and his colleagues on the new board have addressed their responsibilities seriously and realistically. I believe that the way is open to finding a resolution to the difficulties and that we can secure a future for world-class opera and ballet at Covent Garden.

National Lottery

3. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): In what ways environmental projects have benefited from the national lottery. [57242]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The Heritage Lottery Fund, the Millennium Commission and the National Lottery Charities Board have all funded environmental projects. Next year, the new opportunities fund will launch an initiative to help urban and rural communities across the country to understand, improve and care for their environment, in particular through the creation, improvement or acquisition of green spaces.

Helen Jackson: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. My constituency, like many others, includes both

beautiful countryside and large concentrations of people. That can be a problem for the countryside, but we want to use the potential for opening up the countryside to more educational and leisure uses. How, practically, can the lottery help us to get such projects off the ground?

Mr. Smith: Our proposals for further initiatives under the new opportunities fund specifically aimed at environmental improvement will help to do precisely that. We will shortly issue a consultation paper on them. We will be interested to see what the public have to say and will then come to Parliament with specific proposals on the new initiatives.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): In view of the substantial funding for environmental projects by the lottery in Regent's Park, why is it necessary to introduce parking charges there at weekends?

Mr. Smith: I confess that I am unaware of the particular lottery funded scheme or schemes to which the hon. Gentleman refers. However, he touches on an extraneous matter: the Royal Parks agency proposal to introduce weekend parking charges to assist with the general upkeep of the parks and their management at weekends, when their usage is greatest. That is ultimately a matter for the agency to determine.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many areas of Britain could qualify under the new funding arrangements for environmental projects? Does he also agree that, in the coalfield areas, which have suffered greatly as a result, in some cases, of 100 years of pit life and which are now scarred by the closure of all those pits, a lot of work needs to be done, not least in order to provide additional work? Will he give a guarantee that, when he speaks at Barnsley tomorrow, he will pay attention to those issues, so that coalfield areas will be able to benefit from the available funding?

Mr. Smith: I can indeed give my hon. Friend precisely that guarantee. As he knows, we are holding a major conference in Barnsley tomorrow, which will look at ways in which the lottery can provide assistance to the coalfield areas. The extent of the problem is perhaps most graphically illustrated by the fact that, to date, the amount spent by the lottery good causes in Barnsley is £17 per head, whereas the national average for England as a whole is £70 per head.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): Does the Minister agree that parks are an essential part of our national heritage? To that end, will he use his good offices to influence the national lottery people, some of whom do not work like normal people, to consider giving parks more lottery funding? I have in mind some of the parks that are rotting in many local authority areas, and it is to local authorities that are strapped for cash that help should be given. One such park in my area is Hesketh park, which is based on Lord Birkenhead's design and which we really want to preserve.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is assiduous and effective in promoting the interests of his constituency. I was delighted to see that his representations regarding the fate of the pier at Southport have now been fully taken account of by the Heritage Lottery Fund. He will know that the fund has for some time had a major programme of support for the improvement and enhancement of urban parks. I strongly support that programme: it has already done a lot of good work and there is more in the pipeline. In addition, the work that the new opportunities fund is able to put in place under the green spaces initiative will also help.

4. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): In what ways education projects will benefit from the national lottery. [57243]

14. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): How education projects will benefit from the national lottery. [57256]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The new opportunities fund will provide £400 million for out-of-school-hours activities, including child care; it will spend £300 million on new technology training for teachers and librarians; and next year it will help to increase access to lifelong learning, particularly by contributing to the creation of the public library network. That is in addition to the work that the Millennium Commission is already doing in funding projects such as the university of the highlands and islands and the Everyman books for schools.

Mr. Cunningham: Can my right hon. Friend elaborate on that answer? I am sure that he is aware that Coventry was one of the pioneers of adult education. Although we welcome his announcement about children's education, will he tell us more about how he plans to develop adult education?

Mr. Smith: Alongside the green spaces initiative to which I have already referred, one of the key proposals for new opportunities fund initiatives is support for lifelong learning in the community—precisely the area to which my hon. Friend rightly draws attention. We shall shortly issue a consultation paper setting out our ambitions in that respect.

Mr. Griffiths: Although we greatly welcome the £500 million for education from the lottery under the new opportunities fund, will my right hon. Friend consider initiatives for the most deprived areas?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. I have already issued a new set of directions to all the lottery distributors, including the new opportunities fund, to ensure that they pay attention to the particular needs of areas of social deprivation. One of the things that I have always felt is important in lottery policy is that it should not be only wealthy areas of the country—represented by the well heeled, the well advised and the people who can afford consultants and readily produce business plans—that benefit from the funds of the national lottery. People of all classes and from all parts of the country play the national lottery; people of all classes and from all parts of the country should benefit from it.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): In view of the answers given to the three questions on the Order Paper which have already been reached, has the right hon. Gentleman dispensed with the additionality principle?

Mr. Smith: Not at all. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the additionality principle is that

"we will make no case-by-case reductions on conventional public spending programmes to take account of awards from the Lottery. The money raised by the Lottery will not replace public expenditure".

That is a quotation from the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), in September 1994. We stand firmly by that principle.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The Secretary of State has given the game away. He is not in favour of case-by-case reductions; he treats the whole budget as one case and makes a reduction accordingly. Given that lottery funds are now being used to fund mainstream education projects, is it not the case that the additionality principle is worth no more than a discarded Labour election pledge? Now that the right hon. Gentleman has been exposed as a pickpocket of lottery funds, will he tell the House how many other instances of such pickpocketing it should take into account?

Mr. Smith: Judging by the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, he disagrees passionately with the former leader of his party. That does not surprise me in the least, given the extent of division in the Tory party these days.

In answer to the main apparent thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question, surely he agrees that a national programme of after-school clubs for children has never been funded to the extent that we are proposing, and that it will be of enormous benefit to children and parents throughout the country. He should also acknowledge that we put that proposal to the electorate during the election campaign last year; they supported it, and we are fulfilling the commitments that we gave them.

Music Teaching

5. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What representations he has made to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in relation to the teaching of music in schools. [57244]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has policy responsibility for the teaching of music in schools, but my Department has a vital interest in ensuring that the value of the arts is recognised in the curriculum and other education policies. My right hon. Friend and I work closely with education Ministers on that and other subjects of mutual interest to our Departments.

Dr. Cable: Will the Minister acknowledge that there is much concern among musicians and educators about the Government's decision to axe music from the early years school curriculum, despite the availability of a small fund that will help schools that are already well organised in that field? Will he give an assurance that he will continue to press the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to ensure that all children can benefit from a well rounded curriculum that includes the arts and music?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong—no such decision has been made. I acknowledge that there is confusion about the matter—clearly the hon. Gentleman, too, is confused. I assure him that there has been no downgrading of music or the arts in the national curriculum. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is on record as emphasising that

"the development of a child's creativity and imagination is an essential part of a balanced education."

There remains a statutory obligation to offer a broad and balanced education and to include music as a foundation subject.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): How much talent is lost simply because some parents cannot afford to pay for classes for their children to learn the violin, the piano, the 'cello or a wind instrument? Surely that is a waste that the country can ill afford.

Mr. Howarth: I agree with my hon. Friend. There has been a worrying decline—charted, for example, by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music—in the proportion of children in some groups playing musical instruments and taking music lessons in school.

There is tremendous talent in our country. Anyone who had the opportunity, as I did last week, to attend the schools prom at the Albert hall will have no doubt that there is an extraordinary wealth of talent among our young people.

I believe that the new youth music trust that my right hon. Friend has established will make an important difference by enhancing support for musical activity and young people's musical development; as will the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment—which were included in "Fair Funding"—to safeguard local authority provision for music services.

Concessionary Television Licences

6. **Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): When he expects to conclude his review of the arrangements for concessionary television licences. [57245]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson): Our aim is to reach final conclusions on all aspects of the BBC funding review by the end of next year.

Mr. Webb: Will the Minister comment on the press report that the review group will be chaired by the Chancellor's favourite millionaire? While I have nothing against millionaires per se, does the Minister agree that such a person is not well placed to understand the difficulties that many older pensioners, in particular, face in affording a television licence?

Janet Anderson: The hon. Gentleman will know that no official announcement has been made, and I am sure that he would not expect me to comment on speculation. I reassure him that the Government recognise that the current structure of the concessionary licence scheme is imperfect and unsatisfactory. It is time for a detailed examination of the scheme, and the review panel will conduct such an examination.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The licence fee is extraordinarily good value and should be retained.

However, does my hon. Friend accept that many pensioners find it increasingly difficult to pay the licence fee, even though, as they grow older—certainly as they enter their 70s—they are bound to spend more time at home watching television? Does my hon. Friend therefore recognise that—together with all the other anomalies of which we are aware—it is simply just that pensioners should receive far greater concessions than they do at present? I hope that they will before too long.

Janet Anderson: My hon. Friend will be aware that I share his concern about this matter, and I take this opportunity to congratulate him on the excellent work that he has done in this area.

We recognise that the present scheme is unsatisfactory and unfair, but we cannot make any promises that the review will lead to a general concession for all pensioners or for other groups of people. That could lead to substantial increases for all other licence fee payers. However, we can promise that we shall give detailed consideration to the unsatisfactory nature of the present arrangements.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I am sorry to press the point, but I am sure that the hon. Lady will welcome this opportunity to scotch rumours that the BBC funding review will be conducted not by someone who knows about broadcasting but by an economist who is one of the Chancellor's closest friends and married to the Chancellor's special adviser. On reconsideration, would the hon. Lady not love to take this opportunity to dissociate herself from the culture of cronyism that seems to be invading every aspect of this Government?

Janet Anderson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is pure speculation, and I am sure that he will not expect me to comment until an official announcement has been made.

We will take no lessons from the Tories regarding allegations of cronyism. I remind the hon. Gentleman that one of his colleagues in another place, Baroness Denton of Wakefield, said that she had never knowingly appointed a Labour supporter.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): The important factor in this review will be the terms of reference for the review committee. There is tremendous discrimination in the way concessionary licences are issued at present, and it is important to ensure that those on pensions receive the assistance they need in the form of concessionary television licences.

Will the Minister brief us as to the terms of reference that the committee will consider when reviewing the current television licence arrangements? Can we be assured that all pensioners will be treated fairly and will receive their just entitlements?

Janet Anderson: I reassure my hon. Friend that the panel will be asked to consider in detail the present arrangements governing the concessionary scheme. Although we cannot make any promises that the review will lead to a general concession for all pensioners or for other groups of people, we recognise that the current system is unfair and unsatisfactory, and should be considered in detail.

Sports Provision

7. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What moneys his Department allocated for sports provision on housing estates in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial year. [57246]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): As this is the first sports question, may I, on behalf of the House, convey congratulations to Greg Rusedski on Sunday's victory in the Paris indoor open? He is not only a good tennis player but a very nice guy.

My Department's funding for sport is channelled through the English Sports Council and the UK Sports Council. The English Sports Council works with sports governing bodies, local authorities and other sport organisations to ensure that all sections of the community—including those living on housing estates—benefit from this funding. The Government are convinced of the contribution that sports initiatives can make to neighbourhood renewal.

Mr. Hughes: Three cheers for tennis, Madam Speaker. The Minister's comment about Greg Rusedski was more specific than the answer that followed; may I push him further? He knows from his constituency and his London background that, for very little money, it is possible to provide cages, creating football, basketball and netball possibilities in urban areas, close to where people live and safe; and that if the cages are properly looked after they are secure and very good value for money. Will he consider an initiative to try to get such proposals up and running—with partners, if possible—in local authority areas where large numbers of people live in council housing? If I presented him with a proposal for the borough of Southwark, to be run as a pilot scheme, would he consider it to see whether it might be extended to other local authorities throughout the country?

Mr. Banks: The short answer is yes to both questions. The hon. Gentleman knows that the sports lottery fund injects a great deal of money into inner-city areas. I may risk the ire of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) by saying so, but London has received £100 million in lottery sports grants, a great deal of which has gone into inner-city areas such as my constituency in Newham. I hasten to add that that has nothing to do with me, as Sports Minister, but it is rewarding to see the amount of money that is going in.

I am certain that sports funding in inner-city areas can do a hell of a lot to motivate young people, especially those who, tragically, are unemployed or are likely to be wasting their time hanging around. We should use sport to promote social inclusion. That is a popular term at the moment, but the Government are determined to make progress on it. I should be delighted to talk to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) about his proposal.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will my hon. Friend agree, however, that one of the best ways to improve sporting facilities—and to put money into those facilities—in housing estates and other poor areas of the country is to switch from bid-led to need-led lottery

funding? The Government have begun to do so and we welcome the changes that have been made, but the process could be taken considerably further.

Mr. Banks: I agree with my hon. Friend. The English Sports Council's draft lottery strategy identifies several ways in which more help could be given—for example, by using the small grants programme and developing the priority areas initiative. We must pursue those avenues.

It is crucial that we consider needs instead of sitting and waiting for applications to come in. Repeatedly, we find that those who can work up a decent bid get lottery money whereas those who desperately need the money but lack the ability to produce such a bid lose out. That is why we wanted a strategy, and that is what the strategy is about.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Given that a housing estate could presumably, if correctly sponsored, make an application under sportsmatch arrangements, is it true that the Government are contemplating moving the funding for sportsmatch from the Department to the appropriate lottery distributor; and how does the Minister square that with additionality, as it appears to be direct substitution?

Mr. Banks: I do not know which council estate the right hon. Gentleman comes from, but we are looking at sportsmatch—a wonderful initiative, which we totally support—and consulting on it at the moment. There is much to be said for shifting its operation to the English Sports Council, which is doing something very similar, but in that case the money would be ring-fenced so that it went with the scheme from the Department to the English Sports Council. Money would not be lost; additional money would go to the ESC. We are still consulting on the matter and listening carefully to what people say.

All-Seater Stadiums

8. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What assessment his Department has made of the resources needed to make all Premier and Nationwide football grounds all-seating. [57249]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): None. Clubs in the Football Association Premier league and the first division of the Football League were required to go all-seater by August 1994. Clubs newly promoted to the first division since that date have had three years from the date of their promotion to install seating at their grounds. Bury, Bradford City, Crewe Alexandra, Oxford United and Stockport County, which have all gained promotion to the first division since August 1994, are the only clubs in the top two divisions in England still to go all-seater. Bradford and Oxford have until August 1999 to do so, and the other three clubs have until August 2000.

Following the review of the all-seater policy in 1992, clubs outside the top two divisions have until August 1999 to ensure that any remaining terracing meets stringent safety requirements.

Mr. Pike: The Government last year were quick to extend the resources available to the Football Trust to enable it to play a major part in ensuring that we had the widest range of high-standard grounds in the world and high safety standards, which will be important in our 2006 world cup bid. However, many clubs in the lower divisions have severe financial problems. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that the Football Trust will be able to continue that work, to ensure that every ground can provide the safest and best possible facilities for spectators?

Mr. Banks: I certainly want to encourage that development, because I appreciate that the grass roots of football in this country are becoming rather dry. There is a great deal of money sloshing around in football, but it is not filtering down far enough. That is essentially a matter for the football authorities, but I can assure my hon. Friend that anything that I and the Government can do to induce them to bring about a more equitable distribution of that money throughout football we will do with great enthusiasm.

We allocated an extra £55 million funding package for the Football Trust almost as soon as we came to office. I am delighted that Burnley has received more than £3 million worth of grant aid from the Football Trust since 1990. We want to make sure that the best standards apply throughout our grounds, and I will look sympathetically at any proposal to ensure that the work of the Football Trust goes on to enable that to happen.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I welcome what the Minister said, and share the concern of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). The second and third division clubs—as the Minister knows, I am the president of York City—simply do not have the resources to build all-seater stadiums, even if we could get planning consent.

As the question is about resources, does the Minister agree with the comments made recently to all Members of Parliament in a letter from the chief executive of the Football League, Mr. Richard Scudamore—that the continuation of the current BSkyB television deal is essential for the money to filter down into the second and third division clubs? If that changes, what pressure can the Minister and his Department bring to bear on the Premier league to ensure a substitution for that funding if we end up with a pay-per-view deal?

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman tries to take me into other areas, which are dealt with by competition Ministers.

There are a number of things happening in football and in sport generally that alarm me. There is a knock-on effect from decisions in other areas, nationally and, much more significantly, through the European Union. That is why I personally—this is not Government policy—have been strongly in favour of considering some special regime for sport, which would not make it separate from European law or national law, but would recognise the particular interests and problems of sport in serving a local community. That applies particularly to Football League clubs in cities such as York or Chester, where there is a terrible problem about which supporters are coming to lobby the House on Wednesday.

The hon. Gentleman can be certain that the Government will do all we can to ensure that football remains vibrant and active at the level where it really matters—at the grass roots in places such as Chester and York.

National Lottery

9. **Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): What responses he has received from the good causes to the announcement about their future after 2001. [57250]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I announced in July that each of the good causes—arts, sport, heritage and charities—will continue to receive one sixth of lottery good cause funding after 2001.

Ms King: I welcome that announcement. Does that mean that the lottery boards will be able to engage in long-term financial planning? What other measures does my right hon. Friend have in mind to allow such desperately needed long-term planning to take place?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. For the first time, the guarantee that we have put in place post-2001—which is new; it was never done by the previous Government when they were in office—gives each distributor a guarantee of forward funding, and enables that distributor to plan ahead properly. In addition, the development of strategies—which, again, is for the first time a responsibility on each of the distributors—will enable them to put the plans into written form for public consumption, so that everyone knows precisely where they stand.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): Will the Secretary of State comment on the latest figures, which we produced with the help of the Library, that show that, between now and 2005, about £3.7 billion which should have gone to the arts, sports, charities and heritage will be siphoned off, to help fill the Chancellor's economic black hole, into the new control freak fund? Does not the right hon. Gentleman accept that, by turning the national lottery into the Government's lottery, he has betrayed the original good causes and also his party's policy before the general election?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with these views:

"The lottery was not supposed to be a fund-raising mechanism for the Government. That makes it simply another form of taxation. Why should people have to pay more taxes? . . . why give the Government a great big bucket of money?"—[*Official Report*, 25 October 1995; Vol. 264, c. 1095-96.]

The Secretary of State may recognise the florid language of his hon. Friend the Minister for Sport. Those were his words before the election, but the Government have betrayed them since.

Mr. Smith: It may come as no surprise that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. He may have noticed, for example, what the Arts Council of England said when, in September, I was able to announce the £1.8 billion guarantee for income over the present licence period for the council and an additional £50 million. The council's response was as follows:

"The Arts Council is delighted . . . at the announcement of an additional £50 million".

The hon. Gentleman completely ignores the fact that the new opportunities fund was a commitment that we gave to the people of this country during the general election campaign. Unlike Conservative Members, we believe in keeping our commitments.

Lodge Hill Residential Centre, West Sussex

10. **Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): What representations he has received regarding the Lodge Hill residential centre in West Sussex. [57251]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I was quite stunned to note that I have received no representations about the Lodge Hill residential centre, not even from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Flight: I was under the impression that Lord Cowdrey has made certain representations to the Minister for Sport. Lodge Hill is a youth centre in West Sussex that has provided residential courses for hundreds of thousands of students. The county council can no longer afford to maintain it, so it is being set up on a charitable basis. Will the Minister consider, within the powers available to him, some back-up support from lottery funding, and also the possibility of the centre being used in connection with the Government's new deal facilities?

Mr. Banks: I will certainly consult Lord Cowdrey, whom I see pretty regularly, to ascertain what has happened to his letter. Perhaps it was lost in the post.

I am aware of the centre—it provides good outward bound courses, including canoeing and a rope course. I am a great supporter of canoeing and I have often contemplated hanging myself, so it is clear that I am much in support of the centre. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman talks to me, and we will try to contrive a lottery application.

Digital Broadcasting

11. **Ms Sally Keeble** (Northampton, North): What assessment he has made of the impact of digital broadcasting on local radio stations. [57252]

Janet Anderson: Digital radio will increase listener choice and improve the listening experience. I am aware of considerable interest in local multiplex licences from a number of consortiums, and I look forward to the response when the Radio Authority advertises local multiplex licences shortly.

Ms Keeble: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is she aware that many local commercial radio stations that are the only broadcasters will not have access to digital broadcasting? That includes Radio Northants, which covers my constituency. Will my hon. Friend investigate with colleagues the possibility of getting the Ministry of Defence to bring forward its release dates for its current allocation of the digital spectrum, which I think is scheduled for 2007? Is she aware that, if the MOD did that, it would be possible for all local commercial radio stations to provide the advantages of digital broadcasting to their listeners?

Janet Anderson: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. I assure her that we recognise the concerns of radio stations, such as her local station Northants 96. The Government recognise that there is insufficient spectrum to enable every local radio station to take part in digital radio. We are aware of the fact that

the industry is currently preparing an assessment of its further needs and we shall consider that assessment carefully. The Government's aim is to ensure that the advances of digital radio are available to as many people and as wide an audience as possible.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Although the broadcasting developments affecting local radio stations are welcome, does the Minister share my concern about the removal from many stations of regional broadcasters that cover our activities in the House of Commons? What action is she taking to compensate for what I consider to be a direct consequence of the lack of attention that the Government pay to the House and the contempt in which Parliament is held?

Janet Anderson: That is a matter for the broadcasters. The hon. Lady may not be aware that there was a comprehensive debate about this matter in the House only the other day, so she may wish to refer to my response to that debate.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Millennium Experience

27. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): If he will make a statement on the progress of the New Millennium Experience Company in raising sponsorship for the millennium experience. [57270]

31. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What is the total amount of moneys currently identified for sponsorship of zones within the Millennium dome. [57274]

32. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): How much of the funding for the millennium experience from sponsors is *(a)* committed, *(b)* promised and *(c)* made in kind. [57275]

33. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will list the sponsors currently involved in the Millennium dome. [57276]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company is to be congratulated on the significant progress it has made in raising sponsorship for the millennium experience. More than £100 million has been committed by Tesco, Manpower, BT, BSkyB, Marks and Spencer, British Airways, the Corporation of London, BAA, Camelot, GEC, British Aerospace and Thames Water. A further £60 million from 10 major companies is subject to detailed negotiation. It is not possible, at this stage, to divide sponsorship support into specific categories, but the distinction will be made in the company's annual report and accounts, which will be published and laid in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Blunt: In raising sponsorship for the millennium experience, does the right hon. Gentleman think that his real and perceived power over these companies as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry helps or hinders?

Mr. Mandelson: My role in relation to the dome is as shareholder, not as head of the sponsorship team. Although I receive regular reports from the board of the New Millennium Experience Company on its significant progress in raising sponsorship, I have never been, and do not intend to be, involved in procuring or negotiating sponsorship deals, so no conflict arises.

Mr. Fabricant: Of the £100 million committed, what percentage is subject to an irrevocable, signed contract?

Mr. Mandelson: The companies have committed in the way I have described, and I am pleased that they have done so. No one has ever denied that raising £150 million of private sponsorship is a considerable challenge: of course it is. Then again, no one has ever taken the decision to stage such a unique national event. The sums and the event are without precedent. Our best and most forward-looking companies are picking up the challenge because they see their commercial interest coinciding with the national interest. It would be nice if, like those companies, Conservative Members identified with the national interest.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman finds that answer unsatisfactory and he wants to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Mr. Fabricant: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Good, I have got the point, thank you.

Mr. Mitchell: I am delighted to hear my right hon. Friend exuding confidence about the prospects for raising the money, but, if we are still £60 million short and money is trickling in as slowly as press reports suggest, will not that create the real danger that, instead of being the celebration of British history, achievements and prospects that it should be, the millennium experience will be a mammoth piece of commercial hucksterism in which companies from McDonald's to Tesco are allowed to parade their products on the back of £580 million of public money?

Mr. Mandelson: I do not think that my hon. Friend was listening to my reply. I said that a further £60 million from 10 major companies is subject to detailed negotiation. If my arithmetic is correct, that takes us over the target that we have already set. We are getting a great deal for our sponsorship. For example, the children's promise scheme, which is a joint campaign between the New Millennium Experience Company and Marks and Spencer, brings together seven children's charities. It will encourage everyone to donate their final hour's earnings of this millennium to the children of the next. That is something that the entire House can and should support.

I am grateful to my noble Friend Lord Montague of Oxford, whose magnificent salesmanship in the other place has already delivered 86 pledge cards. I will ensure that pledge cards are put in the Whips' Offices of all the parties, including the Conservative party, so that Conservative Members can sign up to children's promise

and give their last hour's earnings in this millennium for the good cause of children in the next. We will see how much we get from them.

Mr. Robathan: I look forward to receiving my card—

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): The hon. Gentleman will be getting his cards very shortly.

Mr. Robathan: Not as soon as the Minister will get a yellow card.

The Secretary of State failed to respond to the question asked by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—£60 million may be the subject of detailed negotiation, but that is not quite the same as having £60 million pledged. What contingency plans does the right hon. Gentleman have in place should the money not be forthcoming? Will he state categorically that he will not dip into the taxpayers' pocket if it is not forthcoming?

Mr. Mandelson: I will happily give that commitment, because the sums that we need have already been identified—they are coming. I understand that Conservative Members are desperately disappointed with the good news that I am able to share with the House today—they will not be happy until the private sponsorship finally fails to materialise, the doors fail to open and the public fail to turn up. Conservative Members will be very disappointed and there will be a lot of long Tory faces at the beginning of 2000, because the millennium dome and experience will be a tremendous success. They will be sorry that they have lacked the enthusiasm and patriotism to support them throughout.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Can I put it to the Minister, gently, that there is at least a perception of a conflict of interest between his roles as Minister responsible for the millennium dome and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? For example, he is involved in regulating Manchester United's possible takeover by BSkyB while sponsorship from BSkyB is coming in for the millennium dome. Would it not be better—having his best interests at heart—if responsibility for the millennium dome were transferred, perhaps to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport?

Mr. Mandelson: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been, but the bid by BSkyB for Manchester United—let us get it the right way round—has been referred by me to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. My responsibilities for competition policy as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry require me to act fairly and impartially, and to be seen to do so. In carrying out these functions, I can categorically assure the House that I am in no way influenced by actual or potential offers being made by companies in support of the dome.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Setting aside any possible conflicts of interest, does not the right hon. Gentleman understand the damage to the dome that has been done by his ridiculous announcements, including those on the sport of surfball, the androgynous figure, the use of a nappy, Siamese twins and so on? Given his failure to secure the total funding sum thus far, in retrospect was he not unwise to liken himself to St. John the Baptist—who, far from attending champagne parties, lived on locusts and wild honey; whose message was never spin doctored, but one of repentance; and whose head, duly severed, ultimately landed up on a plate?

Mr. Mandelson: I do not know how long it took to write and rehearse that question before it was delivered. These are very tired remarks from Opposition Members; we hear constant cavilling, nit-picking and thread-pulling from the usual carping quarters. Opposition Members are absolutely desperate for the project to go wrong, are they not? They will be very disappointed.

28. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What discussions he has had with the United Kingdom's small breweries about promoting local beers during the period of the millennium experience. [57271]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company announced in April that it wanted to serve visitors to the dome with the United Kingdom's best traditionally brewed and popular beers. The company is in discussion with a number of local and regional brewers.

Mr. Quinn: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Black Dog Brewery Ltd. in Whitby will be one of the breweries approached? Without doubt, such a regional flavour will spread the millennium experience around the country. May I also make a plea for Whitby kippers, which would go particularly well with the beer?

Mr. Mandelson: I am sure that the very appropriately named Black Dog beer will be among those that are very hotly considered by the New Millennium Experience Company. As for Whitby's kippers and all the other magnificent products and services, moving the town into the dome might not be a bad idea. The town will certainly have an opportunity to tell its story in the dome under a project called "Our Town's Story", which will enable people from all over the country to tell their story for the benefit and enjoyment of millions of our fellow citizens.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Assets

36. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What impact there has been on the commissioners' assets arising out of the collapse of *(a)* hedge funds and *(b)* other financial institutions. [57280]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I am delighted to say that the commissioners have no investments in hedge funds or any other financial institutions that have collapsed. World stock markets have retreated considerably from the exceptionally high levels of earlier this year. The United Kingdom market, however, which is of most significance

to the commissioners, has given up only the advances that we saw earlier in the year, and since the end of September it has started to show greater stability and recovery.

Mr. Pike: I recognise my hon. Friend's points. Can he assure me that lower stock values have not made it impossible for the Church Commissioners to meet their commitment to provide the Church with funds to meet clergy stipends and pensions?

Mr. Bell: The commissioners use long-term financial assumptions when assessing their distribution capability and policy. They value their assets on an actuarial basis, rather than using current market values. That system looks to the income generated by investments and the likely growth of that income as the basis for levels of distribution, which helps to smooth the volatility in market values to which the question refers.

37. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): What impact there has been on the commissioners' assets as a result of the turbulence in the world's financial markets. [57282]

Mr. Bell: The commissioners' United Kingdom equities comprise a diversified portfolio, which has moved broadly in line with the markets. The commissioners' portfolio continues to out-perform both the index and its benchmark. The commissioners also have significant holdings in commercial, agricultural and residential property. Such diversification of risk has helped to cushion them against any short-term volatility in the stock market.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Given the problems in Japan and the far east and, indeed, the threat of recession nearer to home, will the hon. Gentleman be a little more forthcoming about some of the commissioners' changes to their investment portfolio? Who advises them on changes to their asset allocation strategy?

Mr. Bell: The commissioners use a range of advisers in making their decisions, including their actuaries Watson Wyatt and property advisers DTZ Debenham Thorpe; the WM company and the Investment Property Databank. During 1997, the commissioners conducted a comprehensive review of their investment and asset allocation strategy which aims to provide stable and long-term support for the Church's ministry. As a result, they are rebalancing their assets in favour of securities—primarily UK securities—while reducing their property exposure. In relation to far eastern equities, the valuation losses have been proportionately minor compared with other institutional funds, due to our relatively low exposure to those areas.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): We have seen the effect of turbulence on the Church's portfolio, but what has been the effect of Viagra on the Church's financial standing and that of its portfolio?

Mr. Bell: I am happy to say that our investment in the drug company—which fulfils our ethical investment policy to the hilt—has turned over a recent profit of about £3 million in three months.

Ethical Investments

38. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): If the Church Commissioners will make it their policy not to invest in countries where state organised torture, murder and disappearances are or have been prevalent. [57283]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The commissioners' ethical investment policy is not to invest in companies whose management practices are judged by us to be unacceptable in whatever country they operate. We also aim to invest in companies that are conscientious concerning issues of human rights.

Ann Clwyd: Can my hon. Friend therefore explain why one of the companies in which the Church Commissioners invested was responsible for the armoured carriers on the streets of Jakarta, which sprayed unarmed demonstrators with dye and which are, quite clearly, being used for internal repression?

Mr. Bell: I take this opportunity to reiterate our investment policy on investments in companies before I refer specifically to my hon. Friend's point. The sale of military equipment to regimes with poor human rights records remains a strong concern. Companies in which the commissioners invest confirm that none of the equipment they have exported could be used for internal repression.

In relation to GEC's sales to Indonesia, GEC has confirmed that they amounted to £20 million in 1996–97 and have dropped to £4.6 million in 1998. The sales comprised non-offensive simulation and training equipment, as well as broadcasting transmitters and other forms of telephony.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Following the thrust of the question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), will the hon. Gentleman put it to his colleagues that, rather than having an English-centred view of what is acceptable in terms of international investment, it might be an improvement if, in future, the decisions were also approved by a representative body of the Lambeth conference of worldwide Anglican churches? Without prejudicing the view of some of us that the Church of England should be disestablished, could he also ensure that once a year the commissioners talk to English Members of Parliament and take their advice on what investments should be made on behalf of the Church?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his suggestions. The statutory responsibility of the Church Commissioners is, of course, to this House, and their duty is to provide the wherewithal for the Church to meet its commitments. In relation to the wider question to which he and my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) referred, the commissioners look to the United Kingdom Government and the recently formulated European Union code on arms transfer to put in place safeguards to prevent the sort of sales to which my hon. Friend referred. In that context, the Foreign Office's recent announcement that it will ask two

non-governmental organisations—Save the Children and Amnesty International—to advise on human rights issues is most welcome.

39. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What assessment the commissioners have made of the compatibility of holdings in GEC with their investment policy. [57284]

Mr. Bell: The commissioners' investment in GEC is consistent with the ethical investment working group's view that nations have a right to defend themselves and to engage in peacekeeping initiatives and with the group's belief in the legitimacy of an indigenous defence industry supplying equipment under Government licence. Given GEC's corporate restructuring, however, the commissioners' holdings in the company will continue to be kept under close review by the working group.

Mr. Baker: If the holdings are consistent with the ethical investment policy, that policy is at fault—for the reasons set out by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). Why are the Church Commissioners, who presumably have some connection with Christianity, investing so heavily in a company that produces weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Bell: The ethical investment working group represents the entire Church; it covers not only the Church Commissioners but the General Synod. As responsible shareholders, our duty is to make representations to companies on issues about which we are concerned and about which concern is reflected in the House. As part of that process, a meeting with Lord Prior, the former chairman of GEC, was held on 2 September to discuss the corporate changes in the company that have resulted in a greater focus on defence electronics. We find that GEC continues to listen to our concerns and to respond positively to them.

Central America (Hurricane Mitch)

3.30 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian crisis in Central America and the aid being supplied by the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I apologise to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) for the lateness of his receiving a copy of my answer; we have just come back from a meeting of our national policy forum in Birmingham, and I wrote it on the train.

This year has seen a record number of major natural disasters, and when the crisis is brought under control we should look at how far environmental degradation is one of the causes. Hurricane Mitch, the 13th and fiercest storm of the 1998 hurricane season, has caused widespread damage and severe loss of life across central America, particularly affecting Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua are the worst affected countries.

Official reports suggest that 7,000 people have lost their lives, 9,000 people are missing and about 2.5 million people are badly affected. The terrible contrast between the death toll in central America and the much lower loss of life in the equally terrible floods in Bangladesh cruelly demonstrates the importance of disaster preparedness in countries that are vulnerable to natural disasters.

Since May 1997—a significant date—my Department has been working to strengthen the capacity of the international system to respond very quickly to emergencies wherever they arise. In the past, unco-ordinated shipments of aid and expertise often exacerbated such crises rather than helping.

The first step following Hurricane Mitch was the mobilisation of the United Nations disaster assessment teams; a British expert was made available. HMS Sheffield was in the vicinity and, at the request of the local authorities, was able to make available helicopters, engineers and medical support. My Department immediately offered support to non-governmental organisations that were already working in the countries and so could move very quickly. We have made available £200,000 to the Red Cross regional appeal, and supplies were flown in yesterday.

In Honduras, we have contributed £60,000 to the Pan American Health Organisation for basic health care needs; £94,525 to the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development for food and household items; and a grant of £100,000 to Christian Aid to supply medicines, temporary shelters, blankets and water containers. In Nicaragua, we have channelled £32,585 through the NGO Christian Action, Research and Education for the provision of safe water, food and clothes. We are also sending medical supplies to El Salvador to meet the needs of 20,000 people for three months. HMS Ocean and RFA Sir Tristram are also in the area and, at local request, are providing search and rescue and reconnaissance services.

In the past few days, the European Commission humanitarian office has allocated 6.8 million ecu for the disaster. We will do our best to ensure that that money is disbursed as soon as possible.

My Department has recently agreed a new, enlarged development programme for central America, to which we have committed £6 million. We are currently refocusing the programme to assist with reconstruction when the immediate crisis is under control.

Debt relief is, of course, irrelevant to coping with the immediate crisis, although crucial for reconstruction. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I have been working since we formed our Government to speed up the implementation of the heavily indebted poor countries initiative. Our aim is to ensure that every heavily indebted poor country that adopts economic policies that will reduce poverty will be on track for debt relief by the year 2000.

Before the crisis, Nicaragua was on track to qualify, and Honduras was unlikely to need debt relief. Obviously, the crisis will disrupt Nicaragua's International Monetary Fund programme and, sadly, Honduras's economy is likely to deteriorate so that it may well qualify for debt relief—not a good thing.

The Chancellor and I have announced that we are approaching the IMF and the World bank to try to get agreement that post-crisis countries should be treated more flexibly for debt relief. We are pursuing a similar proposal to benefit post-conflict countries such as Rwanda and Liberia. Progress on debt relief will be crucial to the reconstruction effort but does not assist in the immediate crisis. We must also ensure that post-crisis countries that are not heavily indebted, such as Bangladesh, also receive assistance for reconstruction.

Sadly, it is likely that the region will suffer similar hurricanes in future, so we must ensure that the reconstruction effort focuses on reducing vulnerability, for example through flood protection and the appropriate location of new housing. It will also be necessary to strengthen local and regional capacity to respond when disaster strikes. We have very recently agreed a major programme with the International Red Cross to strengthen such capacity in all developing countries.

We will continue to monitor the situation carefully through the United Nations and the International Red Cross and at local embassies. My Department will still be working in central America when media interest has moved elsewhere.

Mr. Streeter: I thank the Secretary of State for that response, and especially for coming back from what I know is an important conference in Birmingham to give it. I know that hon. Members of all parties will want to send a clear message of solidarity and support to the people of central America who have suffered such an appalling catastrophe.

One of my earliest boyhood memories is of the black-and-white television reports of the terrible tragedy at Aberfan. That tragic loss of 114 young lives shocked our nation for many years. We can only imagine what the people of central America are going through in the wake of losing more than 12,000 of their fellow citizens.

Does the Secretary of State agree—in one sense, she has already said she does—that those people will need and deserve our support for many years to come? Will she join me in paying warm tribute to the aid agencies, which have hit the ground running to try to bring emergency relief to the affected communities?

[Mr. Streeter]

Given that the loss of life has been far greater than any that we have witnessed in recent years, does the Secretary of State believe that Britain's response to date has been commensurate? Has it been proportionate to the scale of the disaster? Is the right hon. Lady completely satisfied that her Department has been sufficiently generous in making funds available? Does she have any plans to make further moneys available in the near future?

Will the Secretary of State say a little more about the anticipated role of the Royal Navy ships on their way to the region? When are they expected to arrive and start work? Precisely what role does she expect our armed forces to play, and to whom will they be accountable? Many of them will be my constituents, so I have a particular interest in her reply.

Can the Secretary of State confirm that she has met in person the ambassadors of the central American countries affected by Hurricane Mitch to discuss their specific needs face to face? After two weeks of the crisis, with more lives being lost daily as a result of starvation and disease, what specific steps are being taken to avert the real threat of many more deaths from cholera and other diseases?

Is the Secretary of State aware that an humanitarian crisis, no matter how grave, is no excuse for sloppy government? Will she explain to the House why on the morning of Friday 6 November she dismissed debt relief as misleading and irrelevant, but by the afternoon of Saturday 7 November she issued a joint press statement with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that made debt relief an essential part of Britain's response to the crisis? What changed in those 24 hours? How had debt relief moved from being irrelevant on Friday to being essential on Saturday? If the Secretary of State had planned to call for the speeding up of the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, why did she not say so on Friday? Does she accept that debt relief was relevant to the people of central America the second that Hurricane Mitch struck their towns and villages?

Will the Secretary of State clarify what the Government are now saying about debt relief? On Friday I called for an immediate moratorium on debt repayments from Honduras and Nicaragua to get them through the immediate crisis, and for a review of the situation thereafter. Does she now agree with that? Do the Government intend to suspend those countries' debt repayments? Do they intend to write off debt unilaterally? What is the Government's policy on debt relief? Is the Secretary of State's policy now the same as that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? If so, at what time on Saturday did their policies coincide? Given its recent track record, will the Secretary of State keep up pressure on the European Community humanitarian office to distribute its funds without delay?

Is the Secretary of State aware that tomorrow, the Disasters Emergency Committee of our leading non-governmental organisations is launching an appeal for funds through the nation's media to provide extra money for central America? Is she aware that the NGOs consider that they need at least £7 million to support their activities on the ground in the short term? Will she confirm that, unlike the Sudan appeal, this appeal will have her unequivocal support, so that the great British public can give their money generously to the people of central America, knowing that they have her full backing?

Clare Short: It is nice to hear a Tory Member start by sending a message of solidarity to people who are suffering in central America. That is an historic move. Sadly the hon. Gentleman is trying to make cheap points and does not understand some of the points that he is making.

The ships that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are already there. HMS Sheffield was helping in Belize. The contrast between events there and in central America tells us something about disaster preparedness. The hurricane was predicted. Belize moved people, so, although there is devastation, there has been very little loss of life. After helping with reconstruction in Belize, HMS Sheffield asked my Department whether it was wanted in central America. We contacted the United Nations team. Sheffield has engineers, medical expertise and, importantly, helicopters. The other two ships are also in the vicinity, and are providing helicopters for reconnaissance.

I have not met the ambassadors. My Department has more direct contact with United Nations teams in the region than with the ambassadors, and communications are difficult. I shall meet them later, but getting things right on the ground is our priority.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman now understands that preventing cholera and hunger is the most immediate need. Like many people in the media, he seems not to understand how debt relief works. In such a crisis, when the mud slides, a person's chances of survival depend on those who are already in the country pulling them out. The international community can help only by having strengthened those capacities in a country.

The second stage, on which the international community needs to move quickly—we are among the best in the world at moving quickly—is bringing in food, water purification tablets and measures that prevent disease and hunger to stop the crisis getting even worse. That is what we are doing. When people are still being pulled out of the mud, anyone who asks whether debt relief will solve the problem clearly does not understand the nature of debt relief.

Britain did not announce large amounts of money on television—unlike some others, including the European Union—while not disbursing anything. We are good at finding out which non-governmental organisations are in the country and getting resources to them immediately so that they can act on the ground immediately and stop cholera. The list of detailed programmes in the statement shows what we have already done. We will try to make sure that the EU money that has been promised is disbursed as soon as possible, because that has not yet happened.

As my statement made clear, debt relief is complex, and I have offered the hon. Gentleman a briefing on the subject from my Department. Unilateral action in relation to IMF or World bank debt is impossible. It would be silly of one country to move alone on export credits, because the good country would simply ensure that ungenerous countries were paid. Moving together is the way to get progress on debt relief. The hon. Gentleman's call for unilateral action shows that he does not understand what he is talking about.

We have acted quickly to deal with the emergency. We had already acted to try to speed up debt relief, but the crisis means that Nicaragua, which would have qualified,

will now be in difficulties. We are talking to the IMF, the World bank and many of our partner countries to try to achieve a flexible attitude towards Nicaragua and Honduras, but that has not yet been secured. It is clear from what the hon. Gentleman has said, here and in the media, that he does not understand debt relief, and I repeat that I would be happy to arrange a briefing for him.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. My view, along with the view of most people who are serious about Sudan, is that the problem there is the need to bring energy to the peace process. Britain has contributed to that. There is a ceasefire, and it is being extended. We are working hard to get more of the world interested in peace in Sudan. There was never a shortage of money for humanitarian relief there, but there was an ever-spreading crisis because of the war. The DEC appeal will be announced tomorrow, following the appeal already made by the Red Cross, which is working in Sudan. Under pressure from us, the DEC has changed its policy so that money from the appeal will go only to organisations already working in the Sudan. That is an improvement.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many hon. Members and people who follow the media understand perfectly that she has made an excellent and comprehensive response? Does she agree that, as a Minister in the Cabinet who is working with her colleagues, particularly my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, she does not have much to learn from an Opposition who never included their Overseas Development Ministers in the Cabinet? We all recall that Tim Raison, in an open letter to his successor, Chris Patten, said that the only time he spoke to the then Prime Minister about his Department was on the day that he was sacked. May I thank my right hon. Friend, and encourage her to continue with her work and to ensure that the European Union treats the problems with the same urgency that she has shown?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I want cross-party support in Britain for the Government's greatly enlarged commitment to international development. We need more united public support if we are to achieve real progress towards helping every country better to protect itself from disasters, to avoid loss of life on the current scale, and to meet international poverty eradication targets. I would even appreciate support from the hon. Member for South-West Devon, but I believe that he needs some briefing.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Secretary of State share my sense of deja vu? I recall not only the Bangladesh disaster, but that this time last year we deplored delays and mistakes in sending aid to the island of Montserrat after the volcanic eruption there. I agree with the right hon. Lady that debt relief is essential in the medium term but of no use in the short term. However, will she explain why it has taken two weeks to send aid to central America? Will the review of her Department's disaster preparedness, which was promised after Montserrat, take place? Will she ensure that the aid going to central America is not just swift but appropriate?

Clare Short: I do not share the hon. Lady's sense of deja vu. In fact, the contrast between Bangladesh and central America is very sharp. Half of Bangladesh was devastated. The loss of life was tiny, and the immediate recovery massive, because the people of Bangladesh have made arrangements to deal with such disasters. We cannot stop nature, except perhaps through environmental programmes, planting trees and so forth. However, we can be well prepared to prevent loss of life. In Belize, people were warned about the hurricane and were moved. Property was lost, but not people. Sadly, those arrangements are not in place in central America, and, after this disaster, we must ensure that they are.

Therefore, it is a case not of deja vu but of learning the lessons of progress. Our Government have been a leading force in the international effort to move rapidly everywhere—whether or not the cameras are there. Progress is being made, but we need more progress in central America. Montserrat is a different case. It was a complete mess under the previous Administration, and it is properly organised now.

It is not true to say that aid took two weeks to start. As the statement makes clear, HMS Sheffield was in the vicinity, but hon. Members must understand that, when mud slides down a hill, the international community is not there. Organisations have to be in the country to act quickly. That is why the Red Cross is undertaking an international training programme throughout the world—so that every country will have that sort of capacity.

We must go in quickly with food supplies and measures to bolster the health service and so forth. Through the World Health Organisation, we have been working with the Pan American Health Organisation so that we have the regional capacity to move quickly, and that organisation did move quickly—it was in before two weeks. Aid is not as good as it should be, but some of our efforts to strengthen capacity in the region came into effect because the Pan American Health Organisation was able to move quickly.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I warmly welcome all that my right hon. Friend is doing in her Department and with other Departments to deal speedily with the situation. Is there more scope for the Royal Air Force to assist in the immediate aftermath of the disaster? Also, when we are in a position to take stock of what needs to be done in future, will we consider the role of environmental degradation when deciding how to prevent such disasters in the first place? Can Government Departments also work together on that matter so that, as far as possible, we can try to prevent further disasters being caused by, for example, global warming and environmental degradation?

Clare Short: First, it is not sensible to ask military forces from all over the world to fly into a small country to deal with a crisis. It is sensible for them to do so if they are in the vicinity. We had three ships nearby which could move in quickly with helicopters when they were needed. It is unlikely that armed forces brought in from a long way away could do as well as existing local people, who know their country best, in rebuilding bridges and so forth.

I agree with my hon. Friend's second point. Today, I met my chief natural resources adviser, who arrived in Birmingham by train just as I was about to leave, and we had a similar conversation. We must consider such factors

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more deeply. He told me that the disaster was partly due to the backwash of El Niño, but there is little doubt that deforestation has contributed. However, it is not a simple matter and I have arranged a meeting with our natural resource advisers after which we will make available the best advice. Obviously, if environmental factors are leading to the increase in the number of disasters, reconstruction must take that into account.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Surely the Secretary of State is right about the debt question, which could not have contributed given the emergency that the people of Nicaragua and Honduras were facing. Debt relief is a long-term process, although I hope that the right hon. Lady agrees that we need to speed up the processes of the heavily indebted poor countries initiative and ensure that it is more quickly available where it is required for redevelopment.

What is the position in Belize? I agree that it was more prepared because a new capital has been built, but what sort of condition is it in? Furthermore, does she agree that the United States has primary responsibility for the area? What efforts is that country making?

Clare Short: I agree about debt, and I know that members of the Select Committee on International Development understand the questions. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are trying to speed up the implementation of the HIPC initiative. We will need to press for similar flexibility for post-conflict countries, which would not normally have the track record to qualify for debt relief, and I think that we can achieve that.

I do not know much about Belize, because it has coped so well. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Caribbean is prone to disasters, but the area has enormous preparedness, with much good local organisation—for example, knowing where to put housing and with what materials to build—with the result that lives are rarely lost and the countries can quickly reconstruct. HMS Sheffield was there to help; that is why it was in the region. I understand that Belize, like Bangladesh, has coped very well.

The hon. Gentleman talked about US responsibility. I agree that we need an international system that can move everywhere. We should all be able to move in our regions because that is how we can move quickly. It is the American region that is involved, but we have our part to play. We have committed a £6 million development programme to Central America. The programme is not so much a bilateral programme with Britain as one that works with multilateral agencies to assist development. We are refocusing it to assist reconstruction. We will make our contribution, but the region should make the biggest one.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Liverpool school of tropical medicine is already working to combat disease in Honduras and Nicaragua and received this morning a report directly from its associates in Honduras describing the devastation there and warning of fears of a cholera epidemic? Will she support all possible measures to enable the school to continue its excellent work in combating disease in Honduras? Does she regard that as a contribution to its centenary celebrations, which are taking place this week?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend knows that I have visited the Liverpool school of tropical medicine. My chief health adviser, who was recently headhunted by the World Health Organisation to head its worldwide roll back malaria campaign—a tribute to Britain—came from the school. The Department works closely with the school and has enormous respect for its work, as do I. However, in the middle of a disaster, one does not get the best medical school in the world to rush into Honduras. We must strengthen local capacity. We have been working with the Pan American Health Organisation to get immediate support in. The school may be able to give long-term advice and help but the old system of flying in experts from all over the world was too slow and created chaos. We are building on regional structures to get the immediate response that is needed.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Secretary of State said that she thought that an all-party approach to such questions would be a good idea. Does she accept that there is an all-party committee on third-world debt, of which I happen to be chairman, with well over 150 members? Only recently, I tabled an early-day motion on third-world debt that 320 hon. Members, including many Labour Members, signed. I would not be surprised if she was one. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it is possible, and certainly not irrelevant, to adopt a twin-track approach? We need proper immediate relief to deal with this horrific tragedy but we also need to engage in a serious attempt to tackle world debt as it applies to countries concerned. Should she not consider whether there should be a moratorium on interest alone, which, for Honduras, would, I understand, amount to only £173 million, whereas a moratorium on the debt itself would involve about £564 million? Will she explain the position and take the necessary steps to deal with both debt relief and the immediate disasters? If she does not, she is liable to become irrelevant herself.

Clare Short: I thought that the hon. Gentleman's last remark was a bit silly, but I know that he takes a particular interest in east Africa, and I am aware of the work of the committee. I guess that so many hon. Members signed the early-day motion because there is so much public activity on debt. It is an example of democracy working: the public care about debt, so MPs start signing early-day motions.

I extend the offer of a seminar on debt to the all-party committee because the public campaigning means that many people think that debt relief is a magic bullet—that if we could only get debt written off, everything would be okay. That it is not true. It is no good pretending that there is a magic bullet. Debt relief is crucial to serious programmes for development and poverty eradication, but it cannot do everything on its own—it goes alongside other activities. I made it clear in my original answer that action on debt relief post-crisis needs to be taken to assist reconstruction. There is no doubt about that, and it is what the initiative undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and me is all about.

May I just point out that this is all media-driven, and driven by people who do not understand debt? The British people call for a moratorium on payments, but the

commitment of the IMF, the World bank and export credit departments across the world is needed, so it is not in our power to deliver such a moratorium. It is in our power to work with our partner countries and with the World Bank and the IMF and to use our influence to achieve the proper flexibility that Nicaragua now needs. Pre-crisis, Nicaragua would have qualified for, and Honduras would not have needed, debt relief. Now, sadly, Honduras almost certainly will need it, and we will work for that. However, it is not in the Government's power to call for a moratorium. There has to be international co-operation if we want to help those countries.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the Labour Government in 1979 spent 0.52 per cent. of gross domestic product on aid and development, whereas the Conservatives halved that expenditure to less than 0.26 per cent. of GDP? Is it not welcome that the present Government are increasing our aid budget, thereby making more resources available for Central America and elsewhere? Is my right hon. Friend aware that many thousands of people working within the voluntary sector for non-governmental organisations, Churches and other bodies are delighted by her work to change the focus of aid and development, which contrasts with the Conservatives' hypocrisy?

Clare Short: As my hon. Friend and everybody else knows, the Tory Treasury team is calling for cuts in public expenditure, saying that we have dangerously increased public spending; yet each individual shadow Minister for a spending Department is calling for more spending. That is the Tories for you, Madam Speaker—not serious at all.

I am proud to be a member of a Government who have kept their word on increasing our commitment to development, strengthening my Department, and reversing the long decline in spending of the Conservative years. However, spend alone is not enough; what matters is how effectively the money is spent. We are driving the system, both in our own country and internationally, to turn to measuring outputs, such as reduction in poverty, children not dying and being educated, and the provision of health care. Only in that way will we achieve really efficient development.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Through the Select Committee, I have just had the opportunity of visiting the World bank and the IMF. The message that came out more clearly than any other was that countries whose Governments are pursuing the right policies and have the capacity to deliver make by far the best recipients of aid. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, while giving aid directly—and sensibly—to the NGOs working in the affected countries, she is making every effort to ensure that the Governments of those countries feel empowered by the policies pursued, not sidelined by direct intervention?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The evidence is now clear: even though the Governments concerned agree because they need the money, reform programmes imposed on reluctant Governments by donors, the IMF or the World bank tend to fail and slip. Only when the local Government want reform, and donors and the World bank get behind them, do we see real and measurable progress on development. We are reorienting all our programmes to get behind Governments who are really serious about poverty eradication. Badly governed people need solidarity to build their civil society and we try to help, but that is not long-term development.

In central America—although, in the immediate crisis, reaching out to NGOs and anyone who is on the ground and can act to get food and health care through is the right thing to do in the short term—we have consulted the Governments of the region about how to work together on development. Now we have to focus on reconstruction, and, if we can get agreement on sensible strong programmes, we can get behind the Governments and get the World bank behind them as well. The sort of pessimistic talk that we have been hearing about 30 years being lost need not be true. If the Governments agree to strong and sensible programmes, we will back them. That is how to achieve considerable progress.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): While expressing real appreciation for the expert efforts of Royal Navy personnel and British NGO personnel in particular, may I ask the Secretary of State to look to the longer term and talk to her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry so as to ensure that the British Government tries to persuade the European Union to adapt its trade policies—perhaps starting with the banana regime—to facilitate exports from central and Latin America to Europe, so that the countries can regenerate their economies more effectively?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that developing countries need trade opportunities, and we take that seriously. We worked hard during our EU presidency on the mandate for the renegotiation of the Lomé convention and to give good access to the European market not only to the least developed countries but to developing countries so that they can build up their economies through trade and exports. We are also working with the United Nations conference on trade and development to provide developing countries with training capacity on their trade rights so that they can exercise them. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that organising trade access and making sure that developing countries have the capacity to take up those opportunities is crucial to their sustained long-term development.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The right hon. Lady said that HMS Sheffield was moored off Belize on what sounded like a DFID matter rather than an MOD matter, and I should be grateful if she clarified that.

More important, the right hon. Lady announced £486,000 of grants from her Department to NGOs. The Ministry of Defence will be faced with substantial expense in marginal costs from HMS Ocean and its associated fleet auxiliary, which has had to steam to the area. If those ships are to give effective aid, they must use their own supplies, aircraft fuel and spares. Will that be a charge to the MOD or to her Department, or does a mechanism exist to enable those MOD assets to be used as effectively as possible in the pursuit of development objectives?

Clare Short: As the hon. Gentleman knows, HMS Sheffield is the West Indies guard ship and was therefore in the vicinity. It moved to Belize immediately because that country was devastated in the way that I

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described, although there was no loss of life. Later, when the crisis hit central America, HMS Sheffield had done its basic work in Belize and asked where else in the region it was needed. We asked locally, and the ship was wanted because it has helicopters, engineers and staff with medical skills that could be put to work immediately.

The other two ships were also, coincidentally, in the region, rather than having gone there specifically for the crisis. They offered their services and again we checked because it is no good if ships just turn up. We told the locals what was available and the ships were asked to come in since helicopters, in particular, are needed because all the bridges are broken.

I am pleased to say that the Ministry of Defence is bearing the costs. The additional cost to the Ministry is small because all the ships were already there, but it is not asking my Department to pay anything. That is important because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, military costs are high and, whenever we are offered military assistance, the costs tend to be prohibitive compared with other forms of assistance. We like collaborating with the MOD and are doing so more, but in this case it volunteered to provide the services without charge to my Department.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On the deployment of HMS Ocean and RFA Sir Tristram, the right hon. Lady will be aware that after Hurricane Mitch struck, there were immediate pleas for manpower assistance. HMS Ocean was, as she said, in the area coincidentally. On board HMS Ocean, RFA Sir Tristram and associated ships are more than 1,000 men of 45 Commando Royal Marines who have amphibious capability—the capability to land quickly. When the right hon. Lady said that HMS Ocean would be involved in search and rescue exercises, she made no mention of 45 Commando. What measures can 45 Commando take to assist and why were they not taken two weeks ago when that plea was first made?

Clare Short: Everyone always looks for a fault. The ships offered their services only in the past few days. We now have—I am proud to say, because Britain helped to build it—an international system that is capable of checking whether the resources on offer will be of any help. HMS Sheffield offered help first, and we immediately communicated that locally. The ship was wanted because the helicopters and engineering and medical skills would be enormously helpful. In addition, the crew had been doing similar work in Belize so they had great knowledge and skill.

The other two ships offered help later. The request then came to my Department and we communicated with the UN agencies locally. Helicopters in particular were wanted. I do not know the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about 45 Commando, but I can find out for him. I have checked and the two latest ships are providing reconnaissance and helicopters. I shall find out more details for the hon. Gentleman. What I have described is efficient operation rather than sending everything that moves into the area and causing chaos. The best way to deal with such crises is to provide systematic and co-ordinated assistance.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Competition Act 1998

Human Rights Act 1998

National Health Service (Winter Resources)

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): This time last year, the Government announced that we had been able to find an extra £300 million to help the national health service to cope with winter pressures. Staff and managers had worked up proposals for all sorts of local schemes to help avoid a winter crisis. The extra money made it possible for them to do what they had planned—and it was a brilliant success. Some £80 million went on the general practitioner drugs bill, but the rest financed almost 1,500 local schemes ranging from grants for extra meals on wheels in Nottinghamshire, to a special respiratory services team in Cheshire to prevent unnecessary admissions, to a joint health authority/local authority rapid response service for elderly people in Bury and Rochdale.

This year, the NHS, local social services departments and the voluntary sector are better prepared for effective joint working than ever before. As a result of conditions that I placed on the special transitional grant, councils are already investing more in order to help prevent people who do not need hospital care from being left in hospital, or people who do not need institutional social care from being placed in residential or nursing homes. This winter, for the first time, we are making flu vaccine available free to everyone over 75, as well as to the usual at-risk groups and key workers.

Last Tuesday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that we would find a further £250 million to help the national health service and social services to cope this coming winter. The English share of that total is £209 million, and I can announce today that the first £159 million will be allocated to health authorities in line with the general allocations to the NHS. The money can be spent only on special arrangements to deal with emergencies, on avoiding people becoming emergency cases in the first place and on enabling patients to get back to their own beds as soon as they can safely do so. The schemes will involve long-term arrangements to improve the speed and quality of treatment and care not just this winter, but for the future. This money will go on arrangements that must stand the test of time.

The remaining £50 million will be held back and used to deal with particular local difficulties and bottlenecks. The regional offices of the NHS and the social services inspectorate have already identified a number of places where there are hold-ups in providing safe discharges from acute hospital beds, particularly for frail elderly patients. The new money will be released to fund schemes that can demonstrate that the money will be well spent. It will not be used to bail out poor performance.

Last year, we had inherited the longest and fastest rising waiting lists in the history of the NHS; so, when we provided extra funds for last winter, I acknowledged that I was asking the national health service to concentrate on winter pressures and I took responsibility—personal responsibility—in advance if waiting lists continued to rise. Rise they did, but they are not rising any more. They fell in May, in June, July and August, and today I can announce to the House that, in September, waiting lists fell by another 29,000. That is the largest monthly fall yet recorded, and it means that hospital waiting lists have fallen by 99,000 since they reached their peak in April.

That is because, providing they have the necessary resources, the dedicated people who work in the health service can deliver the treatment and care that the people of our country want. That is what they showed last winter when they made such good use of the extra £300 million the Government provided, and that is what the million people working in the health service are doing now with the extra £500 million that the Government provided this year to bring down the waiting lists.

The extra £250 million for this winter and the extra £500 million for waiting lists was on top of the additional £1,200 million that the Chancellor had already provided for the NHS in his first Budget, so the extra investment that the Labour Government have put into the national health service this year amounts to almost £2,000 million—£2 billion—more than the Tory Government planned to spend.

And what good use the NHS is making of the extra funds. In the first six months of this year, it treated 195,000 more waiting list cases than in the first six months of last year. It also treated 52,000 more emergency cases. It has therefore treated almost a quarter of a million more people—waiting list cases and emergencies. Not only are waiting lists coming down, but waiting times are improving. Since June 1998, the number of people waiting more than a year has fallen by 9,000—13 per cent. Yet again, today's figures show that no one was waiting more than 18 months for treatment. During the same six-month period, the number of out-patients treated has also risen, by 67,000.

Unless the weather is exceptionally harsh, or there is a major 'flu epidemic, the NHS can face this winter with confidence. That is because the NHS is better organised than before, and now has extra funds for both waiting lists and emergencies. That is because the Government are keeping their promise to modernise and reform the NHS. That, in turn, is possible because of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's prudent control of public spending. That has made it possible to provide extra money for the NHS while keeping overall public spending within the limits that we promised and at the same time reducing Government borrowing from the profligate levels that we inherited from the previous Government.

Those careful policies will continue. That is why the Government have been able to find an extra £21 billion for investment in the NHS over the coming three years—the biggest boost that the health service has ever received. That is why today I can say to the NHS that the extra money available next year will include £320 million extra for waiting lists alone. This is no time for complacency.

That is how we keep our promise to bring waiting lists 100,000 below the level that we inherited. Just as important, we shall modernise the NHS by investing in new hospitals, new plant and equipment. We have started the biggest hospital building programme in the history of the health service. New hospitals are already being built for Gravesham and Dartford, Norfolk and Norwich, Carlisle, Calderdale, Durham, South Manchester, Sheffield, High Wycombe, Amersham, and Greenwich, and 21 more are planned. We owe it to the excellent staff of the health service to provide them with buildings, plant and equipment that match their excellence.

As part of the modernisation, which will improve the way in which the NHS deals with both emergency and waiting list cases, we are introducing NHS Direct,

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a 24-hour nurse-led helpline, which will cover 20 million people by the end of next year. Next year, we are investing in the modernisation of as many as one quarter of all accident and emergency departments. The NHS is starting to make the change to booked admissions, which will allow people to make hospital appointments that suit them. We are starting to invest £1 billion in an information technology system, which will be good for patients and help staff do their jobs more quickly, better and more easily.

As the Prime Minister announced in October, we have decided that the national lottery new opportunities fund should contribute to our new drive against cancer, with tens of millions of pounds extra for new linear accelerators, breast screening equipment, scanners and hospices. Replacing old machines that break down with state-of-the-art equipment will be good for patients and staff, ending delays, cancellations, frustrations and uncertainties—better for dealing with waiting lists and emergency cases.

The extra £250 million investment for the winter, on top of the extra £1,700 million that we have already committed, should help the NHS ensure that it copes with emergencies and delivers on cutting waiting lists. I congratulate the staff on what they have achieved, and look forward to their making even better use of the extra funds this winter and in the next three years. That will be possible only because this Government give top priority to the health service, and stick to their promises.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Although the Opposition welcome any measures to reduce the impact of the winter crisis, I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would provide clarification on a number of points.

Last year, an extra £300 million was put into the winter crisis. Can the Secretary of State explain his rationale in making less available this year, when we are unlikely to be so fortunate as to have so mild a winter for two years running?

Has the right hon. Gentleman made an assessment of the number of extra nurses that will be necessary, and can he say where they will come from?

What impact will attention to the winter crisis have on the waiting lists? As a result of action last year, the Secretary of State had to make a somewhat embarrassing apology for a sharp rise in the lists. He excused that on the grounds of attending to the winter crisis. Given that he is putting in less money this year, what is his assessment of the impact of any winter crisis on the lists?

In the context of the lists, and in order to enable the House to have the fullest possible picture of any such impact, when will the Secretary of State fulfil his promise to publish the waiting lists for the waiting lists? Will he assure the House that the falls in the lists that he is announcing represent patients actually treated? Will he confirm the Prime Minister's statement that patients are not being removed from waiting list statistics without receiving the treatment for which they were put on the lists? How would he or the Prime Minister explain the removal from the monthly returns of patients in Bradford, who were put on a supplementary list but had not yet been treated?

The right hon. Gentleman has made a virtue of announcing to the House today a fall in the waiting lists. Most of us will already have learnt about it from the morning media.

Will the money given to social services from the allocation be wholly additional to the rate support grant settlement, or will it result in adjustments?

Will the Secretary of State give the House a guarantee that no dogmatic barriers will be raised to the appropriate use of the private sector in relieving the winter crisis? Can he confirm that the private sector has already played a significant role in reducing the number of long-term waiters?

Are not the measures announced today a little late? Last year, preparations for coping with the winter crisis had already commenced by September.

In his statement, the Secretary of State made a recycled announcement that he had increased spending on the NHS by £21 billion. Does he agree that, calculated on that basis, he would have had to produce at least £19 billion just to keep pace with our average year-on-year real increases and with inflation, but that, from that extra money, he must do what we did not have to do: he must fund the minimum wage, the working time directive, measures to counteract the millennium bug, and the setting up of primary care groups? Will he confirm that, far from being unprecedented, as he implied, his increase in spending is less than our increases in spending between 1991 and 1994?

We notice the right hon. Gentleman's U-turn on lottery funding. Did not his party in opposition argue against the use of lottery money for expenditure traditionally funded from general taxation? He did not dissociate himself from that argument at the time, as I remember; presumably he is dissociating himself from it now.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that waiting lists are still higher than those that he inherited from us? How many of the hospitals that he proudly listed today are private finance initiative projects for which negotiations were well advanced under the previous Government? Finally, is he aware that, according to opinion poll after opinion poll, the general public are dissatisfied with the way in which this Government are delivering their promises on the NHS? After today's complacent recycling of old and manipulated statistics, is he surprised?

Mr. Dobson: No, I am not surprised at all about what the right hon. Lady has been saying. It is clear that she prepared her response before she had received a copy of my statement.

Miss Widdecombe: No. Most of it was done after we got it; it is the right hon. Gentleman's sums which are wrong.

Mr. Dobson: If that is the position, the right hon. Lady needs to improve her mental arithmetic. Last year we found £300 million, £80 million of which we acknowledged was going on the general practitioners' drugs bill. This year we are finding £250 million, none of which is going on the GPs' drugs bill. All of it is going on the identified schemes that I have talked about, so that is an increase. It is a decrease to the Tories, but it is an increase to everybody else.

What is the impact on waiting lists? I made it clear last year—I have never tried to shuffle out of responsibility for anything that I have done in my life—that there would be money available only to avoid a winter crisis, and that no extra money would be available to help reduce waiting lists, because the feckless ruinous Government who had preceded us had not provided that money. This year, we have provided £1.2 billion in the Budget, and an additional £500 million for waiting lists. We are now providing £250 million, which is earmarked for the winter. That is the best part of £2 billion more than the previous Government intended to spend.

The number of people who are being treated is increasing. I should point out to those who think that we are great statistical fiddlers like the Tory party that the new measure of the number of people treated in the health service counts fewer people than did its predecessor, because we are saying that we shall count people who have a spell in hospital. Under the previous system, with the previous Government, if somebody was seen by three different consultants in hospital, that counted as being treated three times. We have got away from that stupidity, as well.

The right hon. Lady raised the question of the ridiculous article in *The Express on Sunday* the Sunday before last about Bradford. She seems to think that, if someone has a broken arm and has a metal plate or pin put into it, he or she should be regarded as having to wait 12 or 18 months for treatment before the doctor who has inserted it decides that it is safe to remove it. Such people have never been included in waiting lists. It is as daft as suggesting that a woman who discovers today that she is pregnant should be on a waiting list for nine months in the figures that the Tories have come up with.

Information in the news media this morning was published by the Government statistical service, because it has to take responsibility for the figures. Every penny of the money to which I have referred will be additional to the funds that social services departments have already received. As for the £21 billion, the average increase in spending on the national health service over the next three years will be at least 4.7 per cent. Under the Tories, it averaged 3.1 per cent., and only if they included the last year of the previous Labour Government.

We are having to put money into dealing with the millennium bug. It would not have been a bad idea if the Tories had noticed that the year 2000 was approaching before they left office in 1997. There are not many fixed points in this world but the onset of the year 2000 was fairly clearly predictable. Yes, we shall put lottery money into dealing with cancer. I am sure that most people prefer that to giving even more money to the Churchill family.

Yes, some of the hospital schemes are private finance initiatives. They are going ahead only because we sorted out the shambles that we inherited from the previous Government. Again, the feckless, ruin of a Government whom we succeeded left us in the position in which we needed to change the law to enable PFIs to go ahead, which was why even the Opposition nodded through the first Bill that passed through this Parliament.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): People who work in the health service will praise the provision of this extra £250 million. Will my right hon. Friend accept the good wishes of the chairman and chief executive of Nottingham health authority, whom I met last Friday and who spoke warmly about the extra money for the winter and for waiting list reductions? When he allocates the extra £21 billion, will he ensure that health authorities such as Nottingham, that are presently underfunded against capitation, are set a target, so that there can be fairness across the country?

Mr. Dobson: I thank my hon. Friend for his thanks. We are trying to establish an allocation system that is fair to everyone. Increasing resources by £21 billion makes it easier to be fair. In the first part of the allocation of the extra winter resources, Trent region will get more than £16 million. If it does as it did last year, I am sure that it will make very good use of those extra resources.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Liberal Democrats welcome any reduction in waiting times for treatment by the national health service, and any increase in resources given by the Government. I join the Secretary of State in paying the greatest tribute to those who work in the NHS. Since the Government came to office, has there been any increase in the number of people working for the health service? Have vacancies been filled? Have the people who have left come back? Are the numbers employed going up?

Why is it that, after seeing their doctor, people are being told—as in this letter from South Devon Healthcare to a woman awaiting treatment—that they cannot be put on the waiting list, and are being put on a pending list? They will not go on the waiting list until later, so they are not being counted in the figures for the time being.

When will we have the figures, as the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) requested, for the waiting times between seeing the doctor and being treated by the specialist? I refer to the total waiting time, rather than the second half of the waiting time.

Is it the summit of the Government's ambition that, two years after they came to office, the waiting lists and waiting times are still the same as they were when they inherited them from the Tories, and that, at the end of the Parliament, there will be only one in 11 people fewer on the waiting list than there were at the beginning of their five-year term?

Mr. Dobson: That is not the summit of our ambition. The summit of our ambition is to have a national health service that does everything that the people of this country want it to do, and does it as cost-effectively as it does now. We want a health service that is much more proactive: we want it to identify each year the people who need a hip joint replacement, rather than insist, as it has for years, that they walk around limping, lame and in pain before anyone does anything about it. We want to modernise the NHS, and we must get rid of the waiting lists before we can do that. We want a national health service that has smart buildings and brilliant, up-to-date equipment, and matches the excellence of the staff.

As for the number of staff, there are more in some categories and fewer in others. I am sure that the balance will be away from people working in offices and towards people doing things directly for patients.

[Mr. Dobson]

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred to a pending list. If he can identify where there is such a thing as a pending list, I will put a stop to it.

Mr. Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Dobson: If he is saying that people must wait to attend out-patients, and that is what he calls a pending list, that list has been pending since before 1948.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): For 18 years, the Conservatives consistently sought not only to undermine and destroy the organisation of the national health service, but often to do so in the guise of efficiency? They made changes that were supposed to be for the benefit of patients. My right hon. Friend's announcement shows that he is the first Secretary of State who is really committed to the interests of the people of this country.

Will my right hon. Friend please take account of the fact that, although these initiatives are important, others need to be considered at the same time? Will he keep a close eye on the provision of nurses, so that district general hospitals such as the one in my constituency, that have been forced to close some wards owing to lack of adequate staff, will not face that problem in the coming winter?

Mr. Dobson: I thank my hon. Friend for her compliments. Everyone likes compliments, and I hope that we will be able to conduct our side of running the health service in such a way that she will be able to congratulate us on being able to train and recruit the nurses we need. We have difficulties, and roughly 140,000 trained nurses—people who are qualified to nurse—are not in nursing. In case anyone on the Opposition Benches starts glorying in that, those people have not all gone out of the health service since we got into government. The vast bulk left over a long period.

Nursing has been made far less attractive. I believe that some aspects of Project 2000 turned away from nursing a group of young people who might otherwise have been attracted to it. I also believe that such things as getting rid of nurses' homes have been harmful to the recruitment and retention of nurses, especially in the big conurbations. Pay has certainly been a deterrent, and we hope that we can do something about that.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): If everything is as rosy as the Secretary of State would like us to believe, will he guarantee that no patient in the NHS will suffer as a result of the millennium bug?

Mr. Dobson: Only an idiot would do that. Whatever else I am, I am not going to do that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, over the past 18 months, it has been a pleasure to hear him deliver statements in the Chamber? We do not shiver and shudder, and think, "What the hell is he going to say?" Generally, he has come along to tell us that he is trying to repair the crisis in the national health service that the Labour Government inherited.

It is fanciful that, last week, those on the Tory Front Bench were saying that we are spending too much money. Of course, last week was all about the economy. This week, the Tory Front Bencher who was dancing on the stage at the Tory party conference tells my right hon. Friend that he is not spending enough money. We can manage without that kind of hypocrisy, and the hypocrisy of Liberal Democrat Members, who wanted to spend only an extra penny on the national health service.

May I make a suggestion to my right hon. Friend? He has already referred—

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): What about the private finance initiative?

Mr. Skinner: That has upset him, hasn't it?

My right hon. Friend has said that he will have something decent to say about pay. Make no mistake this time: the nurses must get a better-than-the-cost-of-living increase, and it must be paid at one fell swoop.

Mr. Dobson: I listened carefully to my hon. Friend, and I thank him for his welcome for what I have been saying up to now. I hope that he will be able to welcome all future statements that I make, including ones about the pay of people in the national health service.

My hon. Friend is right. As I heard it, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) said that she welcomed these measures. I am not sure whether she does or does not welcome spending £21 billion extra on the national health service; she seems to, but I do not know whether she has ever cleared that with the shadow Chancellor, whoever he may be at any particular time. As for the Liberal party, as I have said before, it is about the only party that has turned the words "I want to spend a penny" into a political slogan.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): A recent study has shown that, as well as cutting waiting lists, a small hospital such as Gainsborough is capable of delivering minor surgery more cheaply than a district general hospital such as Lincoln. I would not expect the Secretary of State to comment on that instance, but will he articulate a general principle—which would be helpful in the Lincolnshire context, where minor surgery has been taken from smaller to larger hospitals—that he wants to encourage surgery to be kept close to the people?

Mr. Dobson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on trying to ensure that the service is nearest to the people who need it—but it must be top-quality and safe. From time to time, people who are better qualified than I to adjudicate on such matters will decide that a certain service needs to be of a particular size before it is completely safe and sound for local people. I have sympathy with the wish to retain as many local hospitals as can be reconciled with that requirement, especially as changes in information technology over the next few years will—probably—make it more possible to deliver top-quality services closer to people's homes.

At the moment, we face a dilemma: pressure—sometimes, there is a reasonable reason—to close a hospital or reduce its capacity. I want to avoid that as much as possible, so that, in five years' time, we do not find ourselves wishing that we had not taken such action.

Pressures remain; on occasion, major specialisations will have to be in major specialist centres—including cancer and cardiac treatment. Fairly recently, we introduced a large regional concentration of children's intensive care, because it makes sense to do so. Such concentration is better for the children who need such care than trying to spread it about, resulting in places without necessary expertise. In that, like everything else in this world, there are gains and losses. We live in a world of dilemmas.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): May I express my appreciation of my right hon. Friend's allocation of additional money, especially to social services? Social services in my area are some of the least financed under the standard spending assessment. The suggested increase will therefore be most welcome to Wakefield district council.

Will my right hon. Friend take note of consultation in Wakefield on the question of new hospital provision? Although my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has helped to try to explain the situation to people in Wakefield every time that we have requested him to do so, we must have assurances from the Secretary of State that the consultation will be meaningful, and that the result will benefit all people in the Wakefield health authority area. Any assistance that my right hon. Friend can give will be appreciated.

Mr. Dobson: The allocation that I have announced today will mean that the Northern and Yorkshire regions will get about £21 million extra for the winter. I hope that that will help my hon. Friend's area as well as any other. As he knows, I recently met people from the Wakefield area. I have said that I want Wakefield health authority to prepare a statement that spells out all the facts, check the impact of any such facts, and reach an agreed position with surrounding health authorities. Once I have such a statement, my hon. Friend and all others who represent Wakefield and the neighbouring areas that might be affected by what is proposed in Wakefield will be supplied with it. At the moment, the consultation does not seem to be carrying much conviction with many people in the area.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the sort of initiatives on the treatment of cancer that he has described would normally in the past have been paid for out of taxation?

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): They would not have been paid for at all—that is the problem.

Mr. Dobson: Exactly; my hon. Friend gives a plain answer. We are finding an extra £21 billion over the next three years for the health service. Our ambitions to improve cancer identification, treatment and care run beyond even the £21 billion. We shall therefore be receiving money from the national lottery to augment the provision, and to provide what would otherwise have not been provided. If the Tories want to oppose that, and say that the priority should be to put money in the pockets of the Churchill family rather than towards treating cancer, it is entirely up to them.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that public opinion showed long ago that people wanted resources from the lottery to be used to speed up research into cancer? Additional resources are needed in that area. The public want and fully support the idea. Will he also confirm that East Lancashire health authority, representatives of which he met on Friday, welcomes the fact that the Government are consistently making good news announcements on the health service, enabling it to plan ahead and not keep having to take steps backwards?

Mr. Dobson: I can certainly confirm that, although I should add that we are proposing that lottery funds go not just to cancer research but to cancer identification, cancer screening, cancer prevention and cancer treatment, and to people who are dying from cancer in hospices. We are spreading the funds more widely than some have previously suggested. We are announcing good news, but with the money East Lancashire health authority is providing not just good but better treatment and care. That is what people entered the health service to do, and that is why they are glad that we are facilitating it.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) posed a long list of questions, one of which the Secretary of State failed to answer. What portion of the £159 million that will be made available immediately will be spent by social services departments? What conditions will be placed on that money? He has reassured the House that the money announced will have no effect on this year's revenue support grant. What deal has he done with the Treasury on offsetting it against next year's local government settlement?

Mr. Dobson: It will not affect next year's local government settlement, because it has to be spent this year. I do not know at this moment what proportion of the £209 million will ultimately be spent by social services departments, because we have not yet seen all the schemes that will be financed. The conditions will be quite straightforward: any of the money that is spent by local authorities will have to be addressed to provision such as that in, say, Bury and Rochdale, where an emergency services team, which is financed jointly by the health authority and local authorities, provides the elderly with immediate attention and help when they are telephoned by a GP, community services or a hospital.

There is no suggestion that any of last year's money, other than that spent on the GP drugs budget, was used for anything other than such purposes. The record of social services and the NHS making good use of the money last year reflected immense credit on all those concerned. The delivery that they made with that amount of money proved immeasurably useful to me in my discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister on the comprehensive spending review, money for waiting lists and extra money for the winter.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. From my rough calculations, it means an additional £4.5 million for Leicestershire health authority, which I am sure even the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) would graciously welcome.

My right hon. Friend referred in his statement to the allocation being in line with general allocations to the NHS. Does he recognise that Leicestershire is one of

[Mr. Andrew Reed]

the areas below its weighted capitation fee? It is also one of the most efficient and effective. Will he describe for my constituents in Loughborough and Leicestershire how the additional money will be allocated to make up the difference in weighted capitation, recognising the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery so far?

Mr. Dobson: The money for the winter will be allocated in line with this year's allocation priorities, so it is fairly easy for people to predict, if they know what percentage of the total they usually get. As I have said, the Trent region will receive a little more than £16 million to share among various authorities in the area. We shall very shortly be announcing the major part of the allocation of funds for next year out of the very large rise in spending on the NHS that has been agreed. I hope that my hon. Friend will be duly pleased with the money that flows into Leicestershire.

Dr. Harris: The extra money is welcome, but does the Secretary of State accept that it would have been more easily and efficiently spent and planned for had it been announced at the outset, rather than following a constant drip feed? After all—in relation to the Secretary of State's remarks to the Conservative spokesman, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), about the millennium problem—winter follows autumn as surely as the year 2000 will follow 1999. In Oxfordshire, it would have been easier not to make redundant social services staff, who can now be reappointed with the authority's share of the funding.

On the Secretary of State's desk lies a proposal from Oxfordshire health authority to close community hospitals in Oxfordshire, including Abingdon. I know that he cannot deal with that specific matter today, and I look forward to meeting him. However, does he accept that a useful way of spending the £50 million reserve would be to ensure that community hospital beds are kept open to avoid the bottlenecking and logjamming we see in acute hospitals, as efficient community hospitals with near 100 per cent. occupancy—such as in Oxfordshire—are threatened with closure?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman understates the capacity of the national health service to do a good job. In his area—and with about similar notice last year as this year—the health authority opened new high-dependency units at a cost of £300,000, put in place community rehabilitation and care teams which reduced admissions and readmissions, and had a mental health intensive support team for people at home—all of which were funded out of the money that was announced in November. The authority managed to do that, and I am confident that it can do so again. The hon. Gentleman should not belittle the capacity of the NHS and local social services to respond promptly when money is made available.

As for the small hospitals in Oxfordshire, I cannot say today what my decision will be about the future of any or all of them. However, the money is intended to help with winter pressures. If a penny of it is spent on anything else, I will want to know the reason why—even in Oxfordshire.

Fiona Mactaggart: I know that the announcement will be very welcome in my constituency, where I recently had a meeting with the management of Wexham park hospital. Those in management have shown themselves to be able to spend such money efficiently in the past, and they are looking forward to the refurbishment of the accident and emergency unit in the spring.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the Conservative party as feckless. The people of Slough feel very bitter that they face a series of cuts in public health services, health visitors and other provision, to pay off the debts run up by Berkshire health authority under the Conservatives, who consistently underfunded our region. We are grateful for the winter help money, but is there anything that my right hon. Friend can do to make sure that Berkshire health authority does not make the people of Slough suffer today for the bad management of yesterday?

Mr. Dobson: When the people of Berkshire and my hon. Friend hear our announcements for allocations for next year, I hope that they will not feel that they must run to make any precipitate decisions on immediate issues. It is worth repeating that the majority of health authorities and trusts—certainly the majority of health authorities—were deeply in debt when we took over from the previous Government: the famous people who claimed to be careful with public money. They were so careful that they were not even paying the NHS's bills.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Secretary of State has consistently avoided answering questions about ways in which the health service waiting list figures are being manipulated downwards. Perhaps I could bring him back to a specific issue. Is he aware of the widespread and increasing practice of pre-admitting patients, whereby, when the admission is entered on a computer—sometimes six weeks before treatment—the patient is removed from the waiting list? In many cases, treatment may not ultimately take place.

Mr. Dobson: That is not being done on any central instructions from me.

Miss Widdecombe: "It's not me, guv."

Mr. Dobson: No, it is not me, guv. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a useful point—and if he wants something done about the matter—he should send me details, and I will attend to it. However, if he is just getting up and blathering, like his Front-Bench colleagues, he will not get very far.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): The people of the west midlands—and north Staffordshire in particular—will welcome the extra money to deal with winter pressures. However, may I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention an issue raised with him by Members of Parliament from north Staffordshire—our concern about the way in which the health authority is mothballing long-stay beds for the frail and elderly? We do need to modernise and change, but does he agree that we must look carefully at safeguarding those beds—at least in the short term—until alternatives are in place? Will he help us to ensure that we have the facilities we need, including long-stay beds, for the frail and elderly?

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend, who was at the Labour party conference, will know that I was able to say at the

conference that we are having a thorough-going review of the availability of beds. It has long been the conventional wisdom in the NHS that the number of beds available has no impact on the provision of care. That always seemed to most people to be contrary to common sense.

When I observed that the NHS opened 700 to 800 extra beds to cope with last winter's pressures—and that it had stopped the closure of 1,000 intended bed closures and was reopening about 2,000 beds to help get waiting lists down—it seemed to me that practice within the NHS last winter was getting closer to confirming common sense than it was to confirming conventional wisdom. That is why I am having a thorough-going review, not just of the number, but of the sort, of beds. There is a relationship between acute beds, long-stay beds and mental health beds which we need to get right. In some parts of the country, it is clearly wrong at present.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's statement this afternoon, will he confirm that the number of people waiting for more than 12 months for treatment has more than doubled, from 31,000 to 63,000, since his Government took office?

Mr. Dobson: It certainly did, and it is coming down again—by 9,000 since June. *[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members want to answer the questions as well as ask them, I will let them get on with it.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The Secretary of State spoke of extra funding for special cases and emergencies, as well as for cancer treatment, through the lottery fund. Can I bring to his attention the fact that there are few emergencies more dire than severe burns cases, that the burns and plastics unit at Mount Vernon hospital in my constituency has treated recently some high-profile burns cases—brought in from Luton and Littlehampton in two instances—and that the unit works alongside and complements a cancer centre of international reputation?

Can the Secretary of State give my constituents—and those of other local members, such as his hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas)—an assurance that the excellent burns and plastics unit will be built up, rather than run down?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman knows that that matter is out for consultation. I am not responsible for the proposals health authorities make—I am responsible only for the decisions I take if their proposals come to me. I will bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's point, because it must be said that I do not always agree with what the people proposing changes suggest.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Will the Secretary of State look at the matter referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)? I have two constituents who have received letters from their health authority—from the secretaries of consultants—saying that they cannot yet be put on a waiting list, and have therefore been put on a pending list. That suggests to me that the demand for services clearly outstrips the ability of the health service to supply them. I hope that some of the extra money will be directed to tackling that problem.

Mr. Dobson: I am confident that the extra money for the winter and for tackling waiting lists will mean that the NHS can deal with substantially more patients this winter—from now to the end of the financial year—than it has been able to do in the past. If hon. Members have any information about pending lists, they should send it to me so that I can deal with it. I give them a hint: if they write to me as "Frank Dobson MP" at the House of Commons, the letter will not get lost in the machine. I receive about 50,000 letters a year, and I will give priority to letters from Members of Parliament.

Political Parties (Funding)

[Relevant documents: Fifth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life on the Funding of Political Parties in the United Kingdom.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

4.59 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I want first to put on record the Government's appreciation of the work of Lord Neill and his fellow members of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. Their report on the funding of political parties in the United Kingdom is the fifth to be published by the committee and the first under Lord Neill's chairmanship. The committee has, as in its previous reports, shown considerable wisdom and balance in addressing the issues.

If the integrity of the democratic process is to be upheld, we must ensure that the whole system of party funding and election expenditure is open, transparent and fair. The committee has come forward with a report directed to that end. I am on record as saying that the Government strongly welcome the report; we are committed to legislating on its main findings as soon as possible.

It is worth recalling how we got to the position that we are in. It is no exaggeration to say that public confidence in party funding reached its lowest point in the years of the last Conservative Administration. The party of government raised millions upon millions of pounds every year, yet persistently refused to tell the public where it got it from.

The extent to which the Conservative party relied on the cash of foreign donors to outspend other political parties at elections is clear. Whether the money was a £1 million gift from a Hong Kong business man or £1.5 million from a Greek shipping magnate, the Conservative party's principal concern seemed to be the size of the cheque. The Asil Nadir scandal merely added to the unpleasant whiff that pervaded Conservative party funding.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): As the right hon. Gentleman is making partisan points—he said that the low point in party political funding was under the Conservative Government—will he accept that the low point in the conduct of referendums was under this Government, particularly in the referendum on Wales?

Mr. Straw: I do not accept that for a moment, but I shall be happy to discuss the conduct of referendums when we reach that point in the report.

In January 1995, I submitted the Labour party's evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which was then chaired by Lord Nolan. In that evidence, I argued for the Labour party that the committee should be allowed to look into party political funding and recommended a regulatory regime similar in detail to that recommended by Lord Neill last month. The Labour party's proposals included full disclosure of political parties' accounts;

"proscriptions on overseas and large secret donations; limits on election spending at national as well as constituency level; new requirements for shareholder agreement . . . in respect of donations by companies".

The response of the Tory party and the Tory Government to the calls for an inquiry on party funding was to do nothing. Worse, the previous Conservative Administration deliberately blocked the Nolan committee even from considering party funding, the most crucial issue in ensuring high standards in public life. The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), repeatedly refused, despite Lord Nolan's views, to refer the issue to him.

The response of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon to Labour calls was typified by his answer to my right hon. Friend who is now Prime Minister during Prime Minister's questions a year before the election. Asked whether the issue of party funding should be referred to the committee, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon replied:

"No. I do not believe that that is the right way to proceed. Party funding has been investigated by the Home Affairs Select Committee".—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1996; Vol. 278, c. 95.]

Some hon. Members will remember that radical Home Affairs Committee report, which was published in March 1994. It recommended that the identity of large donors should remain private and that shareholders should not need to sanction company donations, and it supported foreign donations to political parties.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) will confirm, the Committee—unusually for a Select Committee—split precisely along party lines. As the minutes of proceeding show, it divided 5:5 and the Chairman had to use his casting vote. The minority report recommendation for a funding regime similar in scope to that recommended by Lord Neill's committee was rejected by Conservative members of the Committee using the Chairman's casting vote.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I vividly recall that, in 1993, when I first suggested an inquiry, Conservative members of the Committee fell over themselves to prevent one—they did everything they conceivably could to block it. It was only thanks to one renegade Conservative, who is no longer in the House, that we were permitted to consider the issue at all.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend has greater knowledge of the Select Committee's internal workings than I do, but his account of that pattern of behaviour is corroborated by some of the evidence that was given to the Committee by none other than the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), the shadow Home Secretary, who had then returned to high office as chairman of the Conservative party. On 16 June 1993, the Committee examined him on the Conservative party's memorandum of evidence.

Given the position that the Conservative party is now adopting, the right hon. Gentleman's evidence to the Committee is interesting. He said:

"That individuals choose to give financial support to a political party is, in our view, entirely a matter of private choice. Donors assist the Conservative Party because of their support for its policies. We do not publish details or comments upon the names of donors. That is a matter for donors themselves."

That written evidence was repeated in answer after answer during the right hon. Gentleman's stonewalling performance.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I will give way in a second.

The most uncomfortable moment in what was obviously an uncomfortable session for the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was when he was asked about what had happened—or not happened—to Asil Nadir's £440,000 donation. He was reminded that the money had not been declared in the Polly Peck organisation's accounts. He said, and I quote from page 52:

"Again, I should emphasise the point that the last contribution was made in March 1990"—

as though the effluxion of time had made receiving money from a north Cypriot crook all very well. He continued:

"Clearly, that should have been declared. That is a matter for the company and its auditors."

I hope that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield will now say why, as I understand it, the Conservative party has not given the money back to the shareholders. More years have gone past since he gave his evidence. Well before the Conservative party accepted the money, there was the clearest possible evidence that Polly Peck was, to say the least, a slightly dodgy organisation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I will in a second, after I have given way to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins).

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was reminded of an article in the *Daily Mail* of 13 July 1981—well before the Conservative party started canvassing for money from Asil Nadir. The reporter went to Famagusta and wrote, of a Polly Peck operation:

"I have never seen a store full of canned fruit guarded by men with machine guns before. I never got to see what was in the wooden crates. I glimpsed inside the warehouse."

Everyone had a fairly good idea about where Asil Nadir's money came from, yet the Conservative party took it, and has not replaced it.

Mr. Hawkins: Does not the Home Secretary feel a twinge of embarrassment about the extent of his humbug, when "the people"—as he and his Front-Bench colleagues say—will remember that he and the Prime Minister referred the issue to the committee to cover their embarrassment over the Ecclestone affair, and when we still know nothing about the blind trusts from which so many of his colleagues, including the Prime Minister and the Paymaster General, have benefited?

Mr. Straw: Even the chronology of events shows that not to be the case.

On blind trusts, it is important for the Conservative party to read its own evidence to the Neill committee. That evidence, quoted on page 240 of the report, says:

"We believe that there is an argument in favour of a form of blind trust that should be examined by the Committee."

There is no point in Conservative Members complaining about blind trusts when their evidence to the committee shows that they support them.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Home Secretary has been speaking for about 10 minutes; he spent one sentence saying that he accepted the committee's main recommendations, without saying which recommendations he did not accept. As the committee's new terms of reference were issued on 12 November 1997, nearly a year ago, would it not be a courtesy to the House and to the committee to discuss the recommendations and consider how we can make progress?

Mr. Straw: Of course I will deal with that, but the background is important. Had the Conservative party not deliberately blocked the Nolan committee from considering the issue of party political funding, all the changes that we and the British public want could have been in place well before the general election and this debate would not have been necessary.

It is worth reminding the public and the House of the climate in which the Conservative party was operating. For my bedtime reading, I am fond of political biography and autobiography. I recommend Lord McAlpine's memoirs, appropriately entitled "Once a Jolly Bagman". On page 229, he gives the definitive statement on why the Conservative party always closed the shutters when it came to any scrutiny of its political accounts. He says:

"Personally, I do not think that we ever should have shown how we spent our money. The Conservative Central Office is not a charity dedicated to helping the sick and suffering,"—

he can say that again—

"it is a fighting machine dedicated to winning elections."

Well, it was. He said that it was

"the height of folly to expose how such a machine manages its resources or, indeed, how large or small these resources are at any one time."

Lord McAlpine came up with a final solution to all the nonsense about scrutiny of the Conservative party's accounts. Lamenting the strain on the party's finances, he says:

"There was a black hole in the Party's finances . . . The solution was easy: we gave up publishing accounts."

There we have it.

It is worth reminding the public about the serious concern that existed about the relationship between those who were funding the Conservative party and those who held power in it. Lord McAlpine was the party's treasurer. On page 264 of his memoirs, he says:

"Senior officials in Central Office were in the pay of businessmen and promoting their interests, and I felt that the place was out of control . . . A warning was given to me about a particular businessman, and I passed the message on to two members of the Cabinet who were closely associated with him. Within hours, my words were repeated to this man."

That was the background that we had to face.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, at least as early as 1991, and quite possibly in 1990, the Department of Trade and Industry was investigating Polly Peck? We know from stubs found by the fraud squad that Asil Nadir was signing cheques to the Conservative party's account in Jersey as late as 1990. May there not have been some overlap between the incoming payments and the investigation?

Mr. Straw: I do not know the details as well as my hon. Friend does; no doubt he will make those points when he speaks.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): The Home Secretary has made an inauspicious start, in contrast with the way in which he handled the debate on electoral

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change last week. He is being extremely partisan. There is a fundamental difference between contributions to the Conservative party and to the Labour party. The former did not buy a change in Government policy, but contributions to Labour by Bernie Ecclestone did.

Mr. Straw: There has in the past been a fundamental difference between donations to the two parties. The names of donors to the Labour party have been known, and not kept secret.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): The Home Secretary slipped away from the subject of the Select Committee report before I had a chance to catch his eye, and I want to take him back to it. One of the recommendations was that political parties should not take donations if there was any suggestion of buying policy favours. The Conservative party always accepted that recommendation, but the Labour party never did; we know that it sold policy to the trade unions, but did it do so to any other groups?

Mr. Straw: It is scarcely worth replying to that point. One cannot honestly look back at the history of the Conservative Government between 1979 and 1997 without noticing—to put it as delicately as I can—some coincidence between those whom we now know to have been large donors to the party, and some of the interests that seem, coincidentally, to have been favoured. I make no allegation, but I do not suggest that the right hon. Gentleman makes much reference to the Select Committee report, as it was a pretty disreputable period in the Conservative party's parliamentary history when it used its partisan power on that Committee to block the implementation of recommendations that it now says it will accept. That is why it is so important to put some of the history on the record.

In our manifesto, we promised to

"oblige parties to declare the source of all do[illegible]ove a minimum figure";

to ban foreign funding of political parties; and to ask the Committee on Standards in Public Life to

"consider how the funding of political parties should be regulated and reformed."

The statement in November last year was by no means the first time that we had mentioned the matter.

We moved swiftly to fulfil the last of those commitments, and in November last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that the Committee's terms of reference would be extended to enable it to study issues relating to the funding of political parties.

Originally, we intended to legislate in the current Session to deliver the first two of the manifesto commitments—to ban foreign funding and to require disclosure of donations above a minimum threshold—but Lord Neill wrote to me in January asking the Government to defer legislation pending the conclusion of his committee's inquiry, because of concerns about the simultaneous consideration of the issues by both Parliament and the committee.

Lord Neill stressed that his committee was considering not whether the Government's commitments to ban foreign funding and to require disclosure of donations should be fulfilled but how that could best be done. On behalf of the Government, I agreed to Lord Neill's request, while making it clear that we were determined to legislate on the issues.

All three major political parties, along with many others, made submissions to the committee. The Labour party has in fact long operated voluntary rules to disclose the names of donors who give more than £5,000 and to refuse funds from foreign sources. We argued, in our evidence for limits on spending at elections, for an electoral commission to oversee the regulation of party funding, and for rules to ensure that company donations are made only with the proper agreement of shareholders.

All those recommendations were accepted by Lord Neill and his colleagues. The Conservative party's evidence, by contrast, makes interesting reading. As Conservative Members have clearly not read the references to blind trusts, for example, I commend the evidence to them as an example of what happens when a party cannot make up its mind, as two bits of the party appear to have been involved in pasting that evidence together. We shall be told today that the Conservatives are committed to disclosure. I am glad to welcome any converts. However, their evidence, on page 239 of the report, says:

"Although the Conservative Party is committed to disclosure, there is a case to be made against it and we hope that the Committee will give serious consideration to some of the drawbacks, in particular when considering calls for full disclosure of the names and donors and the amounts they give.

We believe that there is a perfectly honourable case to be made for anonymity."

A similar ambiguity is shown throughout their evidence.

Despite all that circumlocution, some parts of the evidence grudgingly repeat the pledge made by the Leader of the Opposition to disclose the names of major donors—a promise first made on 23 July last year. He said:

"We must be open about our funding. In not being so in the past, we have often appeared secretive and defensive. . . . And so I will instruct our party treasurers that in future years we will list the major donors to the Conservative party alongside our published accounts. But I want to go further than that. . . . We will publish new guidance later this year, and our intention is that in future years the Conservative party will no longer accept foreign donations."

Given the history of Conservative party funding, those are brave words, but they are hollow. Despite all the bravado of fresh starts and new beginnings, 16 months have passed and my best information is that we have yet to see the list published by the Conservative party. If the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) wants to give us more information, I should be delighted to hear it.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall readily do so. The names of donors will be in the annual accounts, which will be published in the next few weeks. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the financial year runs to April.

Mr. Straw: It is helpful to have that information. We look forward to receiving the accounts and the names of donors, which I assume will cover April 1997 to April 1998.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am intrigued. I well remember that, when the Tory party was running the country, the country was £50 billion in debt and the party

was £19 million in debt. The Tories never managed to solve the problem of the nation's finances, but, miraculously, they solved the problem of the party's finances. They had one treasurer who could not run the country, but another who was scouring about for funds. When they publish their accounts, I want to know where the money came from to put the Tory party finances in the black. We need all the information, not just that for the past year.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right that we need all the information, but I fancy that he will be disappointed. He is also correct to point to the success of men such as Alistair McAlpine, who decided that one of the best ways of dealing with the problems and challenges of Conservative party finances was not to publish any accounts. Things have moved on a little, but not very far.

The report provides a good basis for legislation.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) has just given us an undertaking at the Dispatch Box that all donations to the Conservative party will be published. Is there not a danger that, unless that is carefully policed, there will be grouped donations to organisations that then become the registered donor to the party? Will my right hon. Friend press the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield for an assurance that that will not happen? Let us have the assurance in the House of Commons.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to be sceptical about the extent of the information that we receive. When the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield gave his evidence in June 1993, he was asked about such river companies. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) asked about the innocent-sounding Northern Industrial Protection Association, which I thought was a private security company, but turned out to be a group of industrialists funding the Conservative party. Many similar organisations were listed. We accept recommendations 18 and 19 about the use of front organisations and the proposal for an electoral commission to police such matters.

The Neill committee has come up with 100 recommendations, centring on the full public disclosure of donations of more than £5,000 nationally and of more than £1,000 for constituencies, and on the banning of foreign funding, together with appropriate enforcement machinery. However, the report rightly does not stop there, but addresses wider issues, including the public funding of political parties, limits on campaign expenditure, tax relief for donations, company donations and the conduct of referendums.

The next step is to turn the report into legislation. We are setting about that straight away. It will not be possible to introduce and carry through a measure of such scope with due attention to getting the framework and the detail right in the next Session of Parliament, but we intend to produce a draft Bill before the next summer recess and to bring forward legislation so that new rules can be in place for the next general election. In the meantime, there is nothing to prevent the political parties from complying on a voluntary basis with those recommendations that can be complied with without legislation. My party has invited the other parties to agree to a scheme under which the amounts of large donations and the names of donors could be made public immediately.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): If there will be no statutory means of policing election expenses by the time of the elections for the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, how will the issues be policed or regulated in the meantime?

Mr. Straw: I was coming to that. We are laying down provisions in the Scotland Bill, the Government of Wales Bill and the European Parliamentary Elections Bill for regulations that cap national spending. There will be other regulations on compliance. They will not be as satisfactory as they would have been had an electoral commission been in place, but they will be sufficient on an interim basis.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): The Home Secretary said a moment ago that the Government would accept recommendations 18 and 19, but went on to say that the draft Bill would not be available until the summer. By the time he sits down this evening, will we know which recommendations the Government are not accepting?

Mr. Straw: I want to give an indication of that, although it will not be by numbers.

In his speech later this evening, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) will ask each of the main parties to nominate contacts for my officials to deal with on the detail and to take forward some of the specific recommendations.

It is important to look carefully at the enforcement machinery proposed to ensure that it will work in practice. Other countries' controls on donations and campaign expenditure have turned out to be wanting. We need a scheme that is practical to operate, but is also effective and commands public confidence.

I hope that the whole House shares the Neill committee's concern to avoid what it describes as the arms race in general election spending. Limits have been in place for a century or more on expenditure by individual candidates at a local level in parliamentary and other elections. They are fully accepted as part of our election landscape. They were imposed when there was virtually no national campaigning that was separate from local or constituency campaigning. The electoral law takes no account of the increasing national expenditure by political parties, which is separate from that at a constituency level. That is out of date and anomalous. We are committed to putting national limits on such spending.

Having accepted the need for national limits, the next question is where they should be set. There is no right answer to that question. The limits must be set at a level at which they will have an impact, but plainly, no purpose would be achieved if we set the limits at such a high level that they simply encouraged more spending.

For parliamentary general elections, the Neill committee has proposed £20 million. Lesser figures have been suggested—some more tentatively than others—for elections to the Scottish Parliament, the National

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Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Parliament. Certainly, the figures proposed in each case are in the right bracket, and I understand that there is wide acceptance in Scotland and Wales of the proposed specific limits of £1.5 million and £600,000 respectively. We want to hear the views of the public and of political parties before we come to a final view, but we shall ensure that appropriate national limits are in place in time for the Scottish, Welsh and European elections next May and June.

On the form of enforcement machinery, we favour a regulatory body independent of Government and free from party political interference. The Neill committee follows in the footsteps of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, my party and many other organisations in recommending an election commission, and the need for a commission has also recently been endorsed by the Jenkins Commission. We believe that that case is made out, and legislation will provide for an election commission to be established.

Many overseas jurisdictions have an election commission in some form, but there are many models. We need to look closely at how wide the functions of a commission should go. I can tell the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) that we want as far as possible to ensure that there is a consensus between the parties, and that is the purpose of the discussions that are being established.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I welcome my right hon. Friend's acceptance of the valuable election commission, but can he say how the House of Commons, or a Committee of the House, will deal with the commission's expenditures?

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend will recall that the Neill committee proposed that the election commission should be established in a manner that would make it similar to the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee. In other words, it should be a creature of the House of Commons, not of Ministers. There is every argument in favour of that proposal. It is important to establish the commission's independence of Government, and to ensure that it is properly funded. My right hon. Friend knows better than almost anyone that the NAO is funded from the Consolidated Fund, not from votes for individual Departments. That is an important way in which the NAO's position has been strengthened.

We must consider closely how wide the election commission's functions should go. At a minimum, it will need to ensure compliance with the rules on disclosure of donations, the prohibition on foreign funding and the limits on national campaign expenditure. The Neill committee suggests that it should also have general oversight of the conduct and administration of elections. A number of issues concerning the administration of elections are already being looked at by the electoral procedures working party under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department. Some people argue that conferring such issues as voter registration, the franchise and electronic voting on any oversight body would divert it from its core regulatory functions, but my instinct is that those issues ought to be involved.

There is an argument that all electoral matters should be brought under the umbrella of an election commission. Under this scenario—which is not advanced by the Neill committee—the parliamentary boundary commissions would be merged with the new body. The Neill committee did not favour that, but the Jenkins commission was of the view that an election commission should co-ordinate the work of the four boundary commissions. The matter clearly needs further reflection.

Another key area considered by the Neill committee was state funding. The committee came down squarely against a system of wholesale financial support to political parties from the public purse. I support that conclusion. It would be unhealthy for our democracy if established political parties were financed by a subvention from Government. Such easy money could soon result in parties losing touch with their members and supporters, to the detriment of the whole political process.

While I oppose blanket state funding, well established arrangements are in place for targeted financial support or benefits in kind—such as the free post—to assist candidates and parties at elections and Opposition parties in Parliament. Such targeted support is justified in the interests of a level playing field at elections and of ensuring that opposition parties can effectively perform their Parliamentary duties. The Neill Committee has recommended a number of extensions to targeted financial support. Specifically, it proposed: state funding to enable parties to meet the start-up costs of complying with the disclosure requirements for donations; a policy development fund of up to £2 million; and tax relief on donations to political parties of up to £500.

In each case, the Committee has made a well argued case for such financial support, but, no matter how worthy such proposals may be, it falls to the Government and Parliament to consider them against spending priorities as a whole. There may be many people in the country and in the House who would rather see public money spent on further improving our schools and health service than on providing subsidies to political parties. We shall listen carefully to all the points made.

Sir Norman Fowler: We are talking about £2 million or £3 million, not massive amounts. Surely the Government can make a better response than that.

Mr. Straw: I am glad to hear that the Conservatives so impartially support the idea of better funding for Opposition parties. I never noticed them do so when they were in government. There is a good case for better funding of Opposition parties, but if the right hon. Gentleman had listened a little more closely, he would know that I included in that bracket the suggestion of tax relief on donations. I have personal reservations about that, but it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Others may have their own reservations.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I must get on, or I shall take time from hon. Members on both sides who wish to speak.

Neill further recommends that the election commission should have a role in relation to referendums. The Committee says that, in any referendum campaign, there must be a fair opportunity for each side of the argument to be put to voters, and that the election commission should allocate core funding to the two sides. Linked with that recommendation is the recommendation that the Government of the day should, as a Government, remain neutral. So far as use of the Government machine is concerned, the Neill committee says, referendum campaigns should be treated as though they were general election campaigns. However, the committee also says clearly that it should be open to the Government of the day to state their view, and that it would be appropriate for members of the Government to campaign vigorously during referendums.

Those are important comments and recommendations, and they need careful attention in the context of future referendums. It is fair to say, with respect, that this is not the clearest section of the Neill committee's report, not least because of the opening chapter. I have taken some personal interest in this matter, not least because I was on the wrong side in the 1975 referendum—although some might say it was the right side in terms of the argument, but the wrong side in terms of the result.

On the one hand, the committee says, as does the Conservative party, that we should follow the rubric of the 1975 referendum campaign. On the other, however, it seems to imply that it is possible to re-create during a referendum campaign—which, by definition, will occur during the active life of a Government—the conditions that must apply at the end of a Government's term when there is a general election.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I hope to comment further on this point later if I am called. I agree with the Home Secretary that there was some public misunderstanding of the recommendations on referendums, because of the way in which the summary recommendation was put. However, the key issue is that the committee said that core funding should be equal for both sides. Ministers will of course want to campaign, and in some cases—obviously so in the case of proportional representation—they will campaign on different sides of the argument. The committee said that there should not be core funding from the state for one side of the campaign, and Government funding for that side, too.

Mr. Straw: I accept the right hon. Gentleman's point. Campaigning should be for political parties and other bodies. The permanent civil service should not be embroiled in the campaign: that would be quite wrong. However, in some circumstances, it may be appropriate—probably in advance of a referendum rather than at it—for the Government of the day to publish a White Paper stating their views. For some referendums—one on the single currency, for example—Ministers would have to continue to have access to official advice during the campaign. If there were turbulence in the markets, or some other serious question arose during the campaign which related to the conduct of monetary or economic policy, it would be wholly unrealistic to cut Ministers off from that advice.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hope that my right hon. Friend remembers that, in the 1975 campaign, in effect, two sides were pushing the yes point of view and one was pushing the no point of view because the Government put out extra information and put an enormous amount of money into the campaign. By all means allow Ministers access to information, but the British people have the right to know that two totally different points of view are being put forward during a referendum campaign, and that does not consist of two thirds pushing one way and one third the other.

Mr. Straw: I accept my hon. Friend's last point, but we must accept the reality that a referendum campaign will be conducted during the active life and not at the end of a Government. During a campaign for a referendum on a single currency, the Government will still have continuing responsibility for the conduct of economic, fiscal and monetary policy; and if there were turbulence in the markets, Ministers would have to have access to official advice. We are talking not about spending money, but about having access to advice to which they would not have access during a general election campaign.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Home Secretary has made some interesting and useful comments on state funding, but, on the conduct of referendums, does he agree that many people believe that we have already embarked on a campaign on the euro and the single currency? It started recently. Indeed, the Prime Minister told me in an answer to a parliamentary question last week that the Government have spent £3.8 million on radio and television advertising on the euro. Significant sums have already been allocated or disbursed, and further information is to be made available to schools. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that that is all part and parcel of the movement towards changing public opinion, which will be directly relevant to the referendum? Effectively, the campaign has already started.

Mr. Straw: I do not accept that. Whether we or the hon. Gentleman like it or not, the euro is to be a reality in 12 of the 15 European Union countries from the beginning of next year, and 60 per cent. of our trade is with Europe, so it would be wrong for the Government not to prepare business for the impact that the euro will inevitably have on British business whether we are members of the single currency or not.

I shall conclude, as many hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber want to speak. This brief run-through of the Neill committee report has brought me back to my starting point. The Government are committed to ensuring that our post-war tradition of high standards in politics is maintained and enhanced. The people of this country, who entrust to political parties the running of their local councils and national Government, have the right to expect elected politicians to act for the good of the community as a whole, not for sectional or personal interests that are able to curry favour by secretly peddling large financial donations. The integrity of the political system can be assured only if political parties are open and accountable, not only to their members, but to the country at large. The Neill committee report provides us with a framework for achieving that and I reiterate our strong welcome for the report. We will act quickly to implement its main findings and we will be open to comments and suggestions. We want fair and effective controls in place for the next general election. I commend both the report and the motion to the House.

5.43 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): That was not one of the Home Secretary's most impressive speeches. Frankly, he was unconvincing on the referendum question and did not take the House with him in his other arguments. The right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) were right to say that the debate enabled an agreed future policy to be set down. For at least half his speech the Home Secretary was content to make party points about events, most of which took place a decade ago. He talked about political contributions, but the real scandal of such contributions, and the real issue, is whether they buy party policy, and that is institutional Labour policy.

The Home Secretary must remember the Bernie Ecclestone case, when the Government did a U-turn on cigarette advertising, and the fact that Tom Sawyer, when he was deputy general secretary of the National Union of Public Employees and was presented with the prospect of a reduction in union influence, said, "No say, no pay." Above all, the Home Secretary needs to remember the blind trusts set up by the Labour party—by those on the Front Bench—which were so objective and above suspicion that the Neill committee has declared them illegal. We will not take lessons from the Home Secretary or the Labour party.

Above all, I regret the failure of the Home Secretary to lead us forward in the debate. The Neill committee gives the House, politics and political parties an opportunity to move forward which should be taken. I congratulate the committee on its report, which is a comprehensive and fair assessment of all the major issues involved in funding. That does not mean to say, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, that we won all our arguments. However, we accept the findings in the report and believe that legislation based on it should be introduced, with the proviso that it should implement all the major proposals. There should be no cherry picking of one proposal, leaving the others to one side. The Home Secretary's smokescreen on referendums was one of the least convincing parts of a pretty unconvincing performance.

By any analysis, the report comes at an important time. The country faces the prospect of new elections and voting systems—we will debate one system tomorrow evening. Also, and just as important, it faces the prospect of referendums on proportional representation—we look forward to the Home Secretary's contribution on that subject—and on the single currency, if and when, or when and if, the Government decide to put that issue to the public. By any standards, and irrespective of party division, those are fundamental issues which go to the heart of our democracy. Therefore, it is vital that the rules whereby such referendums are conducted are fair to both sides. It would be a travesty if the Government alone controlled the publicity and were the recipients of public money in such a campaign.

As the Neill committee makes clear, no Government can be truly objective in providing information for a referendum if they support one side of the argument. That was my view in the referendum on London local government. As it happens, we supported the idea of a mayor for London, but, when presented with the so-called objective advertising, there was no doubt that most people got the message that they should support the proposed change.

The referendum in Wales was even more questionable. During evidence to the Neill committee, there was widespread criticism of the literature distributed to every household in Wales, because it simply set out the Government's case for the Welsh Assembly. The Neill committee said:

> "We were disturbed, in particular, by the evidence we heard in Cardiff to the effect that the referendum campaign in Wales in 1997 was very one-sided, with the last-minute No organisation seriously under-funded and having to rely for financial support essentially on a single wealthy donor. The outcome of the Welsh referendum was extremely close, and a fairer campaign might well have resulted in a different outcome."

The committee was saying that a profound change had taken place in the structure of government, although serious questions remained about the fairness of the referendum that decided that structure. That should not be allowed to happen again. Both sides in a referendum should have the opportunity to put their case fairly and equally. We therefore support the Neill committee's recommendation on the need to provide both sides of an argument with a proper voice during a referendum.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Would it be helpful for the Minister who replies to the debate to say whether the Government agree with the Neill committee that what they did over the Welsh referendum was wrong? The Home Secretary did not have time, but will the Minister make a commitment that, if a referendum is held in this Parliament before the law is changed, the Government will abide by the recommendations of the Neill committee, even though they have not legislated for them?

Sir Norman Fowler: That is a matter for the Minister when he replies. We have not had too much specific guidance on the issue, so I am not optimistic, but I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Cash: I agree with what my right hon. Friend has said about referendums so far. In the light of the information that I gave about the Prime Minister's answer to me last week, does he agree that, given that the single currency and the euro are, by definition, some time off, it would be intolerable for what is in effect taxpayer's money to continue to be pumped into a Government propaganda exercise well in advance of the referendum? The rules should not be confined merely to the period of the referendum campaign itself, which, by definition will begin well in advance and, in my judgment, has begun already.

Sir Norman Fowler: I knew that the time would come when my hon. Friend and I agreed on Europe; that time appears to have come. I readily agree with what he said. If the Government can use money for propaganda on the euro, there is an unquestionable right for public money to go the other way. I say seriously to the Home Secretary that we will want to review matter this closely.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Does my right hon. Friend accept that he may have been a little hard on the Home Secretary? He will recall that the Home Secretary urged all the political parties to abide by the Neill committee's recommendations; even if the Government had not had time to bring forward the necessary legislation, we should all voluntarily bind ourselves to them. I find it hard to

believe that he would have urged us to do that if the Government had been planning to ignore the recommendations on referendums in this Parliament.

Sir Norman Fowler: My right hon. Friend is renowned as a very fair man. I agree with him. I hope that his interpretation of the Home Secretary's speech is correct. Doubtless the Minister who replies will be able to tell us where the Government stand on referendums, because the House is in some difficulty in understanding their position.

Referendums are a fundamental issue. If they are to become part of our way of political life—there are two coming up—it is right, proper and urgent that action should be taken. The legislation must cover that.

Equally, legislation must cover political funding. The most important part of the proposals of the Neill committee is the national limit on spending. I heard what the Home Secretary said on that; he is going to accept it. The Neill committee makes a powerful case. The table on page 43 makes one point clear. In cash and real terms, the spending of the two main parties at each election has been increasing. In 1997, the Conservative party spent about £28 million on the general election campaign and the Labour party around £26 million. For both parties, that was an increase of more than 100 per cent. since the 1992 general election. It also means that election spending, on the latest basis, is about equal for both major parties.

It is a fiction—I speak from personal experience—that the Conservative party has been consistently able to outspend Labour at every election. In the 1994 European elections, we had no billboard posters up. It is true that I launched and unveiled posters, including one that was intended—my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) will be pleased about this—to show Britain as a European doormat. Regrettably, in its production, it came out not so much a doormat as a cowpat. Once the posters were launched and had done their ceremonial trip around Smith square, they were stripped off the vans ready for the next launch. Fortunately, Labour's posters—it had the money to put up posters—were so bad that they had no effect on the outcome.

I have some sympathy with the view of Peter Riddell, the political columnist of *The Times*, that the effect of campaign spending can be much exaggerated. As he says, Labour did not lose elections in the 1980s because it was outspent by the Conservatives. Equally, on the basis of our spending in 1997, we should have achieved a rather better result than we did.

My observations of the 1987 general election campaign support the Riddell theory. By every sensible indication, we were winning that election by a mile, but, following so-called wobbly Thursday, one or two people in the Conservative camp—not, I hasten to add, the then chairman—thought that we needed to do much more. The result was a splurge of national newspaper advertising, at vast expense. As the Home Secretary will recognise, I am the last person to argue against newspaper advertising, but in this case I am by no means convinced that it affected the outcome one jot.

Objective evidence of that sort is not the point. What matters is what party leaders and campaign managers feel. I suspect that the headquarters of all the major parties feel that they would prefer to have an overdraft than lose the election, so there is a temptation to spend and spend, and the effect is an election spending arms race. I therefore agree with the Neill committee that it is in no one's interest that we continue to go down that road.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): I notice that Lord Young has been mentioned. It is suggested that he was responsible for wasting about £5 million on advertisements, if I recall correctly. Lord Whitelaw said in his memoirs that it was a waste of money. However, such an amount would surely have had a bearing on the attitude of the editorial staff and proprietors of the newspapers in which it was spent. For the record, does the right hon. Gentleman agree?

Sir Norman Fowler: No, not really. I do not remember mentioning Lord Young's name. I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's speech, if he is called.

There is also the issue of how we define a national campaign and over what period the rules should be in place. We would be wise to recognise that there are difficulties there. I think that the guidance given in paragraph 10.48 of the report is as good a way of defining national spending as any. It refers to expenditure

"on account of or in respect of the conduct or management of the election."

Clearly, we will need to examine that definition in the Committee that considers any legislation that results. Equally clearly, it is important that the proposed election committee, which I again welcome, keeps the matter under close review. Nevertheless, in principle, I believe that the limit is sensible, as is the limit on third-party spending in a campaign—spending by an outside body that could influence the outcome of an election. I believe that the Home Secretary agrees with me on that point, but his speech did not make that clear.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Would the right hon. Gentleman include in that opprobrium spending by third parties such as the European Commission during referendums?

Sir Norman Fowler: Yes, I would. I was referring to national elections, but, by analogy, if that money were spent to influence a referendum in this country, there would have to be limits. There is no question about that.

On the question of third-party spending, I was not convinced by the arguments advanced by Mr. Dave Prentis, the deputy general secretary of Unison, that the sort of campaigning his union does during elections is politically neutral. In his evidence to the committee, he said:

"The type of campaigning that we do is not primarily geared to supporting one political party. We are attempting to get the debate centre stage."

I find myself underwhelmed by that argument. I have taken part in eight elections and I am still awaiting that helpful Unison advertising, which I am sure is just around the corner.

Mr. Woolas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: Is the hon. Gentleman intending to make a speech?

Mr. Woolas: I am attempting to clarify the Conservative party's policy, because the accusation that

[Mr. Woolas]

has been made is serious. Unison's advertising campaigns promoting public services are paid for out of what is called the non-affiliated fund, and covered by the certification officer. Complaints were referred to that officer, and Unison was vindicated. May I infer from what the right hon. Gentleman has said that the Conservative party is opposed to promoting quality public services?

Sir Norman Fowler: That is one of the most pathetic interventions that I have heard for some time, but I shall answer it.

I thought that both Front-Bench teams, and even the hon. Gentleman, agreed that we needed to have some control and limits in respect of third-party spending. That is why we are telling the Home Secretary that we want all those points dealt with in the legislation. We do not want to have the sort of cherry picking for which the hon. Gentleman is arguing, because that would be against the public interest. Labour Members must decide on the overall approach to be taken. We have had an inquiry to which we have all given evidence. We have won some of our points and lost others. I suggest that the sensible thing to do is to accept what the Neill committee has said.

On the subject of spending limits, there is a proposal regarding the transparency of political contributions. Again, we accept the Neill committee's finding. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has already acted and, with effect from July last year, has undertaken to publish with the annual accounts the names of all donors giving more than £5,000 in any one financial year.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: Let me continue for a minute.

It important to recognise that the argument on disclosure does not all go one way. That is not just what I believe; it is a point underlined by the Neill committee, which said that there was a risk that the arguments in favour of confidentiality

"will be discounted in the public debate . . . Nevertheless . . . they deserve serious consideration."

I agree.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Paragraph 4.66 of the report makes it clear that, under the Neill proposals, there would be a requirement to identify the original donor of the money. Under its arrangements for disclosure for the current period, and before the introduction of legislation, will the Conservative party do precisely that, or, in the registration—and therefore disclosure—of registered names, will it simply identify individual organisations that make donations, or the individuals who make donations to those organisations?

Sir Norman Fowler: I believe that I am correct in saying that individual contributions will be identified, but I shall check, in time for the winding-up speeches, the position on contributions by organisations.

Mr. Winnick: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why, to the last, the Conservative Government were so strongly opposed to disclosure and why they made sure that the Nolan committee was excluded from looking into party financing? Will he tell us why the Conservatives in opposition have experienced a total, albeit welcome, change of mind?

Sir Norman Fowler: I did say reasonably clearly that there was a case for non-disclosure and confidentiality. We put that case, but it has not been accepted by the Neill committee. We accept the committee's decision.

The case for confidentiality was set out in great detail in the committee's report. I emphasise that it was not only the Conservative party that set forth the case; the committee itself took considerable care over it. There is no requirement to disclose publicly gifts made to charity or to voluntary organisations. One can imagine a business man in a heavily Labour area who would not want to disclose his contribution to the Conservative party, if he felt that he would be discriminated against, and that case could be made the other way around.

When I was chairman of the party, I encountered the exceptional case of a lady who in her will left a large amount of money in the form of a legacy, half of which was to go to charities nominated by the chairman, the other half going to the party. There was one condition: that she remain entirely anonymous. Her living relations, with whom I discussed the matter, agreed with her wishes. We respected her wishes, even though there was no question of her being able to benefit, or influence policy to her own benefit, as a result of the legacy. Those arguments were put to the committee, which rejected them, and we accept the committee's decision.

The most important point about political funding is this: a great deal of time is spent debating the issues surrounding funding, but the basic danger against which we must guard is that a contribution to a political party buys policy. That is the danger in a democracy, and it was that danger that was illustrated when the committee started its work by the case of Bernie Ecclestone.

A leading figure in the world of formula one racing, Mr. Ecclestone, it was disclosed, had given £1 million to the Labour party to help to finance its May 1997 general election campaign. The disclosure came shortly after Mr. Ecclestone had had a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the exemption of motor racing from the ban on tobacco advertising at sporting events—an exemption that was made. It is that sort of issue—contributions governing or influencing policy—that lies at the heart of the debate on political donations.

Mr. Mullin: Just for the historical record, had Mr. Ecclestone previously given any money to the Conservative party?

Sir Norman Fowler: I have no knowledge of that whatsoever.

The issues which I describe also surround the trade union funding of the Labour party. The entire and explicit purpose of that funding has been to influence policy, and we have to question that. Issues of transparency and influencing policy are also directly connected to

blind trusts, which the then Opposition Front-Bench team set up during the last Parliament. The Neill committee gives such blind trusts extremely short shrift, saying:

"The Committee rejects the very concept of such blind trusts as being inconsistent with the principles of openness and accountability. Moreover, there must be considerable doubt whether they ensure anonymity."

The committee's proposal could not be more emphatic, stating:

"Blind trusts should be prohibited as a mechanism for funding political parties, party leaders or their offices, Members of Parliament or parliamentary candidates."

Mr. Linton: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's assurance on blind trusts, but how does he square that with his party's proposal to the Neill committee for a political donations institute, which is intended to have exactly the same purpose as a blind trust—to accept anonymous donations and hand them on to the party concerned?

Sir Norman Fowler: As the hon. Gentleman knows, because he has read the report and the evidence, the institute, which did not exist when the then shadow Cabinet was accepting blind trusts, was proposed as a point for discussion. The Neill committee considered and rejected it, and it was entirely right to do so.

We support the other proposals in the report such as those for foreign donations and we accept the Neill committee's definition on that. We accept also the proposals concerning transparency and disclosure.

I have one caveat. The improper influence of policy is the acid test of all that is proposed. Transparency does not avoid the dangers of contributions influencing policy. There is no question but that it makes the process more open, but there is a need for us and any system to remain vigilant on that point.

In that context, we need to pay particular attention to what we do to help the development of policy, to which the Home Secretary referred. On page 93, there is a proposal to set up a small policy development fund of £2 million. That is a sensible measure. The amount of finance is limited, but it would substantially help Opposition parties—the Labour party could also benefit—and it should not be beyond the Government to accept that scale of spending.

The bigger issue is that of financing Opposition parties in Parliament. Again, we are not talking about big sums. The Conservative party receives £986,000 in Short money, which, because of the formula based on election results, is a reduction of £500,000 on what Labour received in opposition. Clearly the Labour party found £1.5 million inadequate, otherwise it would not have set up blind trusts in the first place.

I have a distinction in the Conservative party in that I am the only person to have been a member of Lady Thatcher's shadow Cabinet and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). The last time around, the present Home Secretary was a political adviser to the woman whom I was shadowing—Lady Castle—and even members of the Cabinet are beginning to look younger. In the intervening period, the conditions of opposition have not changed much. By any objective analysis, the resources devoted to supporting the Opposition parties are inadequate, as hon. Members on both sides of the House know.

We do not require vast sums, but it would be sensible to take this opportunity to make a new start in these procedures and provide for separate budgets for the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow team. In practical terms, that is light years away from general state funding of political parties, which I, like the Home Secretary, do not support. I support the voluntary financing of political parties because that voluntary commitment gives a party its strength. A strong party must therefore have a large, nationwide membership. I agree with the Neill committee that tax relief on relatively small donations would be a sensible way to widen membership, and I am disappointed that the Government are still sitting on the fence.

We congratulate the committee on its report. I emphasise that we would welcome legislation at the earliest opportunity, but we want legislation that covers all the report's proposals, for referendums as well as elections. There is an opportunity for all parties to proceed in agreement, and I hope that the Government will take it.

6.14 pm

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Tonight we must face the fact that politicians are not held in high esteem by the majority of people in this country. In any straw poll in any town centre, people would say that Members of Parliament are here only to benefit themselves and are overpaid and probably lazy. They all think that we scurry off to jobs outside Parliament. They probably also reckon that we all take backhanders. I do not blame people one bit for thinking that—we are well paid; some Members do have jobs outside Parliament; and as for backhanders—the so-called sleaze issue—there have been many cases of cash for questions and associated problems.

I want to focus not only on who funds political parties, but on who funds Members of Parliament. If we are to clean up politics and if Members are to be held in high esteem by voters, we must have openness not only for party political funding, but for Members' outside interests and sponsorships.

The Tories must answer a host of questions about party funding, as was stated earlier. I heard what the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said about accepting the Neill committee proposals, but I want to ask many questions. First, Labour got into government because of what the Conservative party got up to, and we should not forget that. Aspersions have been cast on Members because of the Conservative party's history.

I recall the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) announcing that foreign funding of the Conservative party amounted to very little. I want to know exactly what is "very little". I heard the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield say that £2 million is very little funding for Opposition parties. We still do not know precisely where the Conservatives got their money. The Leader of the Opposition promised to publish his party's list of donors 18 months ago. Where is it? Reading the evidence in the report, I have a sneaking suspicion about why there has been delay after delay in publishing the list. Lord Parkinson said in his evidence that an obligation to disclose all donations over £5,000 would lead to a reduction in the number of people giving money to the Conservative party. It wants to keep its donations secret.

I do not accept the argument that giving money to a political party is akin to giving money to a charity. Donating money to the RSPCA or the local dogs home to

[Shona McIsaac]

look after furry animals is a world apart from donating money to a political party because one wants it to be in government. The Conservatives are delaying publishing their accounts because they do not want that source of funding to dry up, as Lord Parkinson said, or perhaps they do not want to disclose the names of donors because, as in the case of Asil Nadir, they are getting dodgy money from abroad.

I have a few more questions about Conservative party funding. I am partisan, because it was that party's actions that put Labour Members here. Has the Conservative party ever held overseas bank accounts, and if so, will it stop doing so, by accepting the report's recommendations? According to the treasurer of the Liberal party of Australia, the Tories have raised millions of pounds in Australia. Why do they not come clean about those foreign donations tonight?

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield said that he wants to make progress and start afresh, so I suggest that he answers those questions in the Chamber. I want to know whether the Conservatives Abroad association comprises members who are not registered to vote in Britain. Is that another Conservative organisation that channels money into the party? Another big question is how the Tories turned a debt of £20 million into a surplus of £7.4 million, when allegedly all their big corporate donors had deserted them.

We have also heard much about blind trusts and the funding of the Opposition Front Bench. Let us examine the finances of the Leader of the Opposition. Has he revealed who funds his office? Why did he move out of the Parliament building and set up an office elsewhere? Why is that money not declared in the Register of Members' Interests? Those questions must be answered tonight if we are to have openness and total transparency.

I refer to another quote from Lord McAlpine's wonderful book. He said that Conservative central office was basically "out of control" and stated:

"Junior officials in central office were in the pay of businessmen"—

Mr. Straw: Senior officials.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my right hon. Friend for that correction. Lord McAlpine said that senior officials were "in the pay of businessmen and promoting their interests".

We want to know who those businessmen are.

As I said earlier, it is about not only who funds the political parties, but who funds Members of Parliament. Yes, we have the Register of Members' Interests, but I believe—I am probably in the minority—that it is full of loopholes. There are many ways to get around the register. If we dip into it, we will see the list of Members of Parliament—they are largely Conservative Members—with directorships and sponsorships. Some of the specifics are disclosed and some are not. Members of Parliament are not required to make an exact disclosure of how much money they receive from jobs outside Parliament that they secured simply because they are Members of Parliament. We need to tighten up the register; if people are to trust us, we must discover who is funding Members of Parliament.

The Neill committee report should also be tighter. I note that the Government intend to accept the majority of its proposals, but I believe that the report's recommendations on donations to political parties should be tighter. The provisions should be worded in such a way as not to give the Tories another little loophole through which to channel money here, there and everywhere. They have done that in the past, and they will do it again. The Tories will have to do so, because, as we know, their money is drying up and they need to find another way of breaking the rules. I ask my right hon. Friend to address the issue of who funds Members of Parliament and to consider incorporating that—

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Shona McIsaac: No, I will not; I am making only a short speech.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to examine who funds Members of Parliament and who funds the political parties. We must discover whether the House needs also to address the former issue. In the past, my right hon. Friend has considered making the corruption of Parliament a criminal offence. Councillors have much stricter registration rules than apply in this place. I should like the same strict standards to apply to us and to our interests, so that we may move forward to a different era in party political funding and the funding of Members of Parliament.

6.23 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): My right hon. and hon. Friends and I broadly welcome the Neill committee's report, and take the view that, although it does not go as far as we have gone—and, indeed, as far as we recommended in our evidence to the committee—it represents a significant advance in the attempt to control the distortions produced by improper political funding and, perhaps even more important, to correct the public's perception that the political process was up for grabs. If that was the case—and I believe it was—it was due largely to the performance of the outgoing Conservative Administration.

To listen tonight to the speech by the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), was to experience some surprise—I put it no stronger than that. There has been something of a Damascene conversion on the Conservative Front Bench, and we have not been given any explanations for that quite remarkable change of mind. Most people who were concerned about Parliament's good name found it difficult to comprehend the previous Government's obstinacy in refusing to allow the committee—which they set up—to consider the funding of political parties.

There was some slight mitigation, in that the committee was established fairly close to the time of the general election. It might have been difficult to implement before that election measures designed to deal with problems that were manifest on all sides. Such a move might have been viewed as an attempt to close the door after the horse had bolted. However, the House is entitled to a more detailed explanation than was afforded by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield of how the Conservative party has come to stand on its head on this issue. His address to the Home Secretary—delivered in a somewhat holier-than-thou tone—about cherry picking seemed to me to be self-interest not very heavily disguised.

I am happy, on behalf of my party, to accept the report's broad—and most of its particular—conclusions. However, it is not, I believe, appropriate to refrain from

making positive suggestions in order to flesh out the report where it is incomplete. The report is not couched in the form of instructions to counsel. We should not be accused of cherry picking if we take the view that the committee has not argued its case as forcefully or as convincingly as it might.

At this stage, it is right to question the Government further about their intentions regarding the report's implementation. The Home Secretary said that we would not see in the next parliamentary Session legislation to give effect to what I believe is the core recommendation: the establishment of an electoral commission. That is understandable, but I regret that the Home Secretary did not lend any sense of urgency to backing that proposal. If a draft Bill were produced towards the end of the coming parliamentary Session, there might be further consideration of it during the following Session and no legislative action for some time. That would be highly undesirable. I profoundly hope that the Government will include such a proposal—I understand that they cannot announce tonight the contents of next year's Queen's Speech—in their legislative programme.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman is correct: we cannot announce tonight next year's, or even this year's, Queen's Speech. He understands the constraints on Ministers: we cannot say that a particular piece of legislation will be in the Government's legislative programme in a year or so. With that caveat, the Government are committed to legislating on the Neill committee report. We also want to ensure that we get it right, which is why we intend to publish a draft Bill. I very much hope that the right hon. Gentleman and the other main parties' representatives will join the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), in the working party on that, so that we may get the detail right meanwhile.

Mr. Maclennan: My right hon. and hon. Friends and I shall be happy to participate in any constructive discussion. *[Interruption.]* As the Under–Secretary says, such discussions are already going on. Does the Home Secretary intend the work that is being done by the Under-Secretary to be subsumed by the electoral commission when that is up and running? What is being done at present has followed the pattern of previous Parliaments—a review of general electoral law, and tidying up. That will no longer be an appropriate matter to be led by a Minister in future, but should be led by the commission. No doubt that issue will emerge when these matters are further considered.

We urgently need to deal with these matters not so much because of the need to clean out the Augean stables, the legacy of the previous Conservative Government, as because of the need to deal with the public perceptions of, and immediate problems associated with, forthcoming elections and referendums. Since the most recent general election, our constitutional scene has changed dramatically. There is to be a series of elections—especially those that will take place in spring 1999—in which very many of the matters addressed by the Neill committee will arise.

It is important that we have a detailed expression from the Government of their intention to give effect to the recommendations where legislation is not necessary, where that may be done in respect of the European elections, the elections to the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, and, although we have not yet had legislation for the government of London, in that election as well.

The committee proposed that Opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, for example, should be entitled to some state funding—a sort of Short money. A clause to provide for help for Opposition parties had been added to the Scotland Bill, but the Bill that became the Government of Wales Act 1998 was too far down the track before the committee reported, so a question remains about the Government's intentions regarding the Welsh Assembly.

What plans have the Government to deal with the recommendation that tax relief be granted on donations to political parties? I listened to what the Home Secretary said on that. It is right for him to listen to Members' views, but a long delay is not necessary. A quick response is likely. The official Opposition have already made a positive response. I responded favourably to the report, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. I hope that the Government will act in the next Finance Bill.

The Neill committee's arguments for its recommendations on referendums were less than totally compelling. I detect in the official Opposition even more nervousness about those recommendations than about some of the others. The committee obviously understood the issues, and its desire that there be a level playing field between the two sides of an argument in a referendum campaign was sensible and equitable. However, the committee took an artificial approach to the role of Government.

It is not easy to draw a line between facts and opinion, and if a referendum is to be conducted on a central issue of Government policy—the only occasion on which referendums are likely to be held, and on precedent many of them will focus on matters of constitutional change—it is ridiculous to suggest, or imply, that the Government should be hampered in making their case as the Government. Is the implication that a Government who go to the country to ask whether the country supports a Government policy must contract out the case to another body before it is possible to have a properly financed campaign? Such a set-up would be artificial in the extreme.

Mr. Swayne: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, during a general election campaign, Ministers are quite capable of going to the country to argue their case in a partisan way? Is it not too much to expect similar activity to take place in a referendum campaign while the neutrality of the Government machine is maintained, as it is in a general election campaign?

Mr. Maclennan: I do not believe that it is as straightforward as that. In general elections, Governments are judged not only on their record and their programme for future governing but as individuals. Voting preference at a general election is determined by a complex thought process. I believe that it is possible to draw a distinction between what happens in a referendum and what is done by Governments qua Governments as candidates for re-election during a general election campaign.

[Mr. Maclennan]

The general election rules have worked relatively well, although they were stretched by the previous Administration, which churned out highly expensive, illustrated official documents, which often had surprisingly little in them except propaganda. In that area—

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: No. I am finishing answering the question asked by the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman when I have done so, if he still wants to intervene.

In a referendum, on precedent, the matter being examined is a narrow choice, or a choice which—although its impact and effect may be very significant—may be considered discretely, without any reflection on the Government as a whole. Indeed, in the 1975 referendum on the European association, the Government as a whole had a position, but there were two positions taken by members of the Government.

In the holding of referendums, the prime duty is to ensure that both sides of the case are properly heard and argued, so undoubtedly funding should be made available to those who oppose the Government's proposition; but the suggestion that the Government's case should be contracted out to a campaigning body is an artificial approach, which I would not espouse.

I do not quarrel with the view that suitable restraints might be placed on Ministers participating in the formal campaign, but, as we have heard from the Conservative Benches, it is not the formal campaign that moves minds but the arguments that are going on all the time. The fact that a Minister who attends a meeting to advocate the Government's case is advised not to drive to it in his official car is neither here nor there. What gives the Government the great advantage is the fact that they have made a specific case continuously in the period prior to the formal referendum campaign.

I would have examined closely the arrangements made to furnish the no side of campaigns with suitable resources, and the propriety of certain meetings being handled differently from the way in which they are dealt with at general elections. We should not pretend that the balance of arguments is other than somewhat stacked behind the Government, by virtue of the fact that the Government's own policy is at issue. To try to muffle the issue and pretend that the Government could be neutral about their own policy—I believe that the word "neutral" appears in the report—would be wholly artificial.

I would give way to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) at this point—but it seems that he no longer wishes to intervene.

A further issue is the campaign period for referendums. The report suggests that the period should begin after Royal Assent. It is not entirely clear to me what the committee had in mind in that part of its report. If a referendum Act did not specify a date for a referendum—which is possible, as it might be left to subordinate legislation to do that—at what point would that requirement become operative? There are many such points of detail, which the committee understandably did not think it right to consider. That will leave a good deal of work for Members of Parliament to give flesh to those bones.

I found the committee's report less than compelling in respect of party political broadcasts. It is curious that, although the report makes some suggestions about the role of the election commission in that connection—for example, the election commission might use its good offices between the broadcasters and the politicians—there is no formal recommendation about the role of the commission. Recommendation 95 exhorts broadcasters to

"do all in their power to maintain . . . strict . . . neutrality",

but it does not recommend that the election commission should have a formal role in that regard.

Mr. MacGregor: The explanation is that, although the issue was raised with us during the evidence, we did not feel that we could make a recommendation on that point, because our remit was entirely to do with political funding.

Mr. Maclennan: That is a helpful explanation. It lends force to the view that we should not feel that we are departing from our proper response if we do not follow every dot and comma of the committee's recommendations. There is much to be said for giving the electoral commission greater powers over party political broadcasts than was directly advocated by the Neill committee.

For some time we have lived with an extraordinary arrangement, which has not worked as well as it might and which is rather fragile in its base. We have a shadowy committee of members of all the parties who are supposed to have a role in the matter, but at the last general election that role seemed almost to disappear. Now there is dialogue between individual political parties and the broadcasters. That has tilted the balance too far away from the necessary objectivity, and needs to be policed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): It might help the right hon. Gentleman to know that the issue has been raised with me elsewhere. It is our intention, through the electoral procedures working party, which I chair, to encourage the broadcasters to enter a dialogue with the political parties about how the new regulations might be made to work more effectively and, by implication, more fairly.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the Minister. I am aware of his support for that view. However, we should not rely simply on the good behaviour of the broadcasters, as a matter of happenstance. We should consider whether the entire issue should be covered by regulation. I am increasingly of the view that that is necessary—the more so as the outlets for broadcasting expand and the opportunities for "narrowcasting" become clearer. The committee referred to that, without drawing any conclusions from that development.

My party was in favour of an element of state funding, so it will not surprise the House to learn that the arguments advanced by the Neill committee against state funding did not command our total support. It was never our view that that should be a substitute for the individual or other funding that has traditionally sustained our

democracy. We would consider it wrong to seek entirely to substitute state funding for that. However, democracy depends heavily on political parties for its effectiveness. There should be no political embarrassment in giving taxpayers' support to that process.

That philosophical point of view has to some extent been overtaken by events, at least temporarily. I take exception to the Aunt Sally raised by the Neill committee when it dismissed the idea that state funding should be established for the indefinite future. I do not believe that such a proposition was before it. A period of experimentation with state funding would have been worth-while, but I shall not flog that horse further.

On foreign funding, I broadly support the Committee's views. There have been spectacular occasions of unacceptable interventions from abroad in support of the outgoing Conservative party. I should have liked to press the committee—as the Home Secretary did, without any answer being vouchsafed—on the case of Polly Peck.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): That is a past issue.

Mr. Maclennan: It is not just a past issue, but a continuing scandal. It is up to the Conservative party to rectify the matter as soon as possible.

There have been one or two glancing references to European organisations during the debate. It would be interesting to know what attitude the Government would take to them. Would such organisations be regarded as foreign—for example, for the purposes of election to the European Parliament? I believe that that would be drawing the net too tightly.

I take exception to the Neill committee's recommendation that donations to political parties should be received only from people who are eligible to vote in the United Kingdom. I do not know whether it was the committee's deliberate intention to rule out people under the age of 18 from participation in or membership of political parties. If that was the case, it seems to be a mistaken intention. I hope that the Government will look closely at that.

The main purpose of the Neill committee, which I wholly endorse, is much greater openness about donations. Save for what might be regarded as a Committee point, which is to express some doubt about the practicality of the proposal that donations of more than £5,000 should be reported to the election commission within seven days during an election period—that is the 12th recommendation—I find myself in broad agreement with everything that the committee has to say on donations. My party has as its target the disclosure of donations of more than £1,000, and, as most of our donations are less than £5,000, that is a considerable undertaking.

As for time, we have rules about reporting expenses during elections, and I think that they have worked reasonably well in terms of time. Returning officers have to receive reports from election agents in a given time. To avoid muddles, uncertainties and possibly substantial additional expenditure, which the committee recognised might be the consequence of its recommendation—and particularly because the committee proposes to invoke the criminal sanctions for a breach of this rule—I think that the time limit might be regarded as somewhat too tight.

It would be of interest as well to know whether the Government have it in mind to render void an election in which some criminal practice such as that to which I have alluded has been engaged in. It seems to me that that possibility would be at least as likely to have a deterrent effect as some ex post facto criminal sanction meted out to the malefactor.

I conclude by expressing my appreciation, and that of my party, to the Neill committee, which has worked quite fast to produce its 100 recommendations. I have no doubt that these recommendations need further refinement, or that they will receive careful attention and broad support from the majority of right hon. and hon. Members.

6.52 pm

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): I welcome the report of the Neill committee, and I welcome also the extraordinary volte face that we witnessed from the Opposition. I remember hearing the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) give evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs in 1993, when, needless to say, I was sitting on the press benches.

I had to pinch myself several times this evening during the right hon. Gentleman's contribution to reassure myself that it was the same right hon. Gentleman to whom I was listening. I look forward to hearing the speeches of his colleagues, the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), who is a member of the Neill committee, and, if they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the right hon. Members for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), who have, in common with the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench, been chairmen of the Conservative party. We look forward to seeing whether they are able to throw any light on the mysteries of Conservative party funding over the past few years.

I do not want to look back to the past; I want to address myself to the contents of the Neill committee's report. I start by saying that I think that the committee should be congratulated on facing the central issue in its terms of reference by recommending a limit on election expenditure. You may remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I was rash enough in my maiden speech to suggest—you were kind enough to rule me in order—that the huge sums that the parties received from undisclosed sources were like a cancer in our political system. I very much welcome the recommendation that the parties should be obliged to declare donations of more than £5,000. I welcome even more the fact that the committee has not fallen into the trap of believing that disclosure is enough. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield said almost exactly the same thing: transparency does not avoid the danger.

The cancer that has invaded our body politic is not only that we have not known where the money is coming from, but that, increasingly, it has come from individual millionaires, with all the attendant dangers. I do not necessarily mean the dangers of corrupt deals behind closed doors; we do not know enough to say whether there have been any. I am talking about the danger that parties will feel beholden to their donors. They will be nervous of offending them, and anxious not to jeopardise their chances of another donation.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am grateful to my colleague from the Select Committee on Home Affairs for

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

giving way. We cannot continue to suggest that there may be something improper about the dealings of the Conservative party when we have direct evidence that the Labour party has done a complete stitch-up deal with a business man, and has been exposed to public view not by members of it, but by other means. Bernie Ecclestone gave the Labour party not £5,000, not £7,500 but £1 million, in exchange for which he got a change in policy. It is outrageous for the hon. Gentleman to suggest, with no evidence, that there is a mote in the eye of the Conservative party when there is a socking great beam in the eye of his own party.

Mr. Linton: I shall come on to the plentiful evidence about the corruption that may have occurred over the past few years. As for the Ecclestone affair, I shall say only that the Government behaved openly and honourably, naming the Labour party's donors and returning donations that could have influenced decisions. Even though the Government, with the best of intentions, declared the donations and returned the money, it is certainly true—I agree with the hon. Gentleman to this small extent—that the very act of accepting donations of such magnitude creates difficulties for any party and for any Government.

I was about to say that I believe that the committee has set too high a figure in suggesting that £20 million should be the expenditure limit for elections. We all know perfectly well that we cannot raise that sort of money from wine-and-cheese parties and bring-and-buy sales. When Lord Sawyer was giving evidence for the Labour party to the committee, he said:

"To raise that kind of finance . . . we have had to seek donations up to £1 million, and we would need to continue that sort of fundraising programme in the absence of any substantial state aid."

We need a limit that removes the need for millionaire donations.

In its evidence, the Labour party suggested £15 million, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that he believed that that figure was in the right bracket. I hope that my right hon. Friend tends towards the figure originally suggested by the Labour party, or even the figure that I would prefer of £10 million, which I think would avoid the need for the fund raising that we have heard about to be undertaken by any party in future.

We must remember that, in every election for the past 100 years, the Conservative party has outspent all other parties. That may not have helped them in 1997, but excluding coalitions, the Conservatives have been in power for 70 per cent. of the past century. However big or small we believe the role of money to be in elections—there is plenty of debate about the subject—I do not think anyone can seriously doubt the proposition that elections should be fought on a level playing field. Only one member of the committee disagreed with that view, just as only one member of it was a member of the previous Government. The report quoted him, and the right hon. Gentleman will be able to tell us whether the quote is fair. It is as follows:

"He disputes the view that election expenditure is excessive, comparing what is spent in any one year on promoting washing powders, butter spreads and toilet rolls."

I refer, of course, to the right hon. Member for South Norfolk. I shall leave it to him to explain what on earth he meant. The right hon. Gentleman should explain why he argued strongly against the extension of state funding, whereas he enthusiastically supports a trebling of Short money for Opposition parties now that he is in opposition for the first time in 18 years.

The introduction of tax relief for donors to political parties is bound to help people in higher rather than lower tax brackets. The Home Secretary says he has reservations about that. The purpose of preventing millionaire funding of political parties is to encourage a large number of small donations instead of a small number of large donations. I fully accept that the tax system can be used for that, but I urge my right hon. Friend to consider the use of tax credits, as in Canada, which give people the same rebate whatever their level of spending, unlike tax relief, which is tied to the rate of tax and depends on whether a person pays tax.

The report should have dealt with one or two other points of detail. Although the increase in Short money is welcome, the committee stopped short of recommending an extension of the provision to the governing party. That is illogical. Short money for Opposition parties is to be trebled, but the parliamentary Labour party has an important role to play in supporting members of the Government, who have their private offices, and the more than 300 Government Back-Bench Members. I do not see the logic of using Short money for Opposition parties only, given that the needs of the Government party are so much greater.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I was not a Minister in the previous Government, but, as a shadow spokesman, I have to rely on precisely the same office costs allowance that he receives as a Back Bencher.

Mr. George Howarth: As I did.

Mr. Greenway: As the Under-Secretary rightly points out, so did he. There is a world of difference between our duties as Back-Bench Members, including holding the Government and our own party to account over policy, and trying to hold the Government to account as an Opposition spokesman.

Mr. Linton: Of course there is, but Opposition Front-Bench Members receive almost £1 million of Short money. It is up to the hon. Gentleman to speak to his colleagues who are responsible for distributing that money to ensure that it is used for its intended purpose, which is to assist Front-Bench Members in research. I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman: it is not enough. However, he and the committee should have the grace to recognise that there are other needs in Parliament apart from those of Opposition Front-Bench Members—but I do not want to dwell on that.

The committee turned its face against any limit on the size of donations. I fully recognise that it can be difficult to enforce a limit on donations: it is much easier to limit expenditure than to limit income. When the committee was given its brief, the Prime Minister said that he looked to the committee for its views on anything up to and including a complete cessation of business funding. I do not know whether that would be practical, but it is rather pusillanimous of the committee to rule out any limitations on donations. The problem that it is trying to address has been created by these huge, £1 million-plus donations.

I welcome the attention that the committee paid to the issue of shareholder ballots. The previous Government introduced one trade union Act after another to make it more difficult for trade unions, through their political levies, to affiliate to the Labour party, but they never applied the same standards to companies. I welcome the fact that the committee strongly recommends that companies and trade unions should be dealt with on an equal basis.

If a company wishes to give money to a political party, it should put the issue to its shareholders at least once every four years. Only if it has the support of its shareholders should it give their money to political parties. In the past, very few companies have done that. Marks and Spencer and Rank have held votes of their shareholders, which have always been in favour of political donations. Shareholders in Marks and Spencer voted by 50 million votes to 12 million: that decision puts the trade union block vote in the shade. The principle that shareholders should decide whether to give money to political parties is right.

It is a great shame that the committee stopped short of extending to shareholders the right that the previous Government rightly insisted should be given to trade unionists: to contract out of a levy that they did not agree with. It used the excuse of impracticality: it said that it would be impossible to exempt particular shareholders from paying a contribution to a political party. If it is so easy to ballot shareholders on political donations—it merely requires another question to be printed in the annual report, which is sent to every shareholder—it is not beyond human endeavour to find a way of enabling shareholders to contract out of a political levy.

I welcome the report's recommendation on state aid for political research, and I hope that it receives all-party support. It mentions £2 million, which is a fairly small amount, but it would make an enormous difference to the most important function of political parties—to work out the policies on which they would run the country if they were given the chance. Taxpayers will surely realise that this is a small investment in a worthwhile area.

In line with the Labour party's evidence, I think that the committee should have gone further. It should have allowed state funding to be used for political education within parties and for the training of election agents, councillors and party officials, such as treasurers. Political parties in this country are small voluntary bodies. They are fragile and underfunded, and they sorely lack the basic expertise required to take over the running of the country.

On party election broadcasts, the report goes so far, but not far enough; it recommends that they should be retained. I accept that not every television viewer immediately switches to a party election broadcast; nevertheless they are an important part of the communication between the parties and the voters, and they are a bulwark against the Americanisation of British politics. We all know about the amount of money that is spent in American politics on television and radio advertising. Even in the mid-term elections last week, huge amounts of money were spent by both parties. Those sums would dwarf the spending of our parties in elections. Rules on party election broadcasts must apply to all existing and future channels. I hope that that important guarantee will be written in at a later stage.

The committee is right to say that, although blind trusts were started with the best of intentions—to insulate Front Benchers from the pressures of donations—experience suggests that they cannot be guaranteed to succeed. The committee also turned down the Conservative party's suggestion of a political donations institute, which is quite right.

I was glad to see in the report a chapter that has not yet been mentioned—that on the honours system. The Conservative party often denies it, but the honours system has been a central part of fundraising, not only up to and including the days of Lloyd George, but, I regret to say, even since. If any Opposition Member is tempted to deny that, I simply point to the brutal figures: under the previous Government, 50 per cent. of honours for exports or industry were given to people who happened to have contributed to Conservative party funds, whereas the proportion of companies that gave money to the Conservative party was, at the most, 6 per cent.

I asked a statistician at the London school of economics to work out on a tri-squared table exactly what the chances were that it was a pure product of coincidence that 6 per cent. of the universe received 50 per cent. of the awards. He worked it out as a chance of one in 10 to the power of 133. I do not deny that it is possible that there is no causal connection whatever between honours and donations to the Conservative party, but the Conservatives would be asking us to believe in a rather long chance if they insisted on maintaining that.

The committee was right to include the honours system as part of a report that is basically about fundraising and to insist that the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee should be enlarged, broadened and given stronger powers so that the temptation to use the honours system as an implicit reward for fundraising—I do not say that open deals have been done, or that any agreement has been written on paper—would be countered.

The report contains the most extraordinary notion that money does not have any effect whatever on election results, which is an idea that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield described as the Riddell thesis, from the political correspondent of *The Times*. It was also defended in the committee by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has been chairman of the Conservative party, as has the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster. Why on earth did they spend money on advertising if they seriously expect us to believe that money does not have any effect on elections? Why did not they close down central office? Why does the advertising industry exist? How do newspapers exist, if advertising is completely ineffective? It is stretching belief beyond the point of endurance to suggest that advertising is effective for toilet paper or breakfast rolls, but somehow ineffective in politics.

Mr. Brooke: Does the hon. Gentleman recall the observation of the great man at Unilever who said that he knew that half his expenditure on advertising did not work, but he did not know which half?

Mr. Linton: Those are wise words. I would put the chances at even more remote than that. In political advertising, a designer could be asked to design 12 posters,

[Mr. Linton]

but only one would strike a chord, resonate with the public and win votes. Having the money to try out 12 posters to find out which one works makes a difference, not because each is successful or because all money spent on political advertising succeeds, but because every now and then—bingo, one hits the jackpot, as any treasurer of the Conservative party would concede.

Lord McAlpine, who has been much quoted in the debate, once told a former press colleague of mine, "If you've got £1 million or £2 million to spend on political advertising, forget it; if you've got £8 million, you can make people believe anything you want." Having the right amount of money to spend on political advertising is important.

I should elaborate on state funding. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary suggested that the report had come out squarely against state funding. That is not my reading of it; for one thing, state funding comes in many different forms—in kind, free mail, free lettings and free broadcasts. Such state funding is not only supported, but warmly encouraged, by the report, and there are many ways in which the committee wants to extend it.

The committee has great reluctance about state funding in cash, as probably almost all hon. Members have, but let us understand that the reason for that reluctance is not that there is something intrinsically bad about it. Every European country, apart from the United Kingdom, has state funding—there is nothing necessarily wrong or corrupt about it—but the history of party funding in this country in the past 10 or 20 years has been so dispiriting and so alarming, that it is understandable that people have turned against the idea of giving cash aid to the parties that have scraped the bottom of the barrel.

Ironically, lack of state funding was the reason why the parties scraped the bottom of the barrel. The fact that they scraped the bottom of the barrel in turn became the reason why the public would not countenance state aid, but, in time, people will realise that the price of getting rid of millionaire funding of our political parties will, in the end, be an increase in state funding—perhaps in kind, perhaps with strings or perhaps bit by bit; that is the direction in which this will lead.

The report said not that the committee was squarely against state funding, but that the arguments were finely balanced and that the time for it had not yet come. I would accept that: people are not ready for state funding, but we must accept in our hearts that, like every other country in Europe, we will sooner or later have to move further in that direction.

We should not miss the historical importance of the Neill report, simply because we have—I am glad to say—an unexpectedly wide consensus on it. The report will close a shameful chapter in the political life of this country. In a sense, I am sorry to have to become partisan, but the historical record and the historical reasons have to be spelled out: for the past 20 years, the Conservative party has relied heavily on donations from millionaires to finance its election campaigns. We are not able to say whether there has been any corruption only because we know so little about who gave the money, but there have been quite enough cases—I promised the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) that I would come to this—and quite enough ethical issues raised by donations that have become known.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned the £450,000 that the Conservative party accepted from Asil Nadir, only a year before he was being investigated by the Conservative Government for fraud. It accepted £1 million from Octav Botnar, shortly before he moved to Switzerland over a disagreement with the Inland Revenue about alleged underpayment of taxes of £57 million; and £5 million from Graham Kirkland, shortly before he became a knight in the birthday honours list.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is clearly suggesting that Sir Graham Kirkland, to correct his name, received a knighthood simply because he had given money to the Conservative party. The hon. Gentleman and Labour Members do not understand that people have been recognised through the honours system because of what they have done for this country and for employment. Unlike the Labour party, they have created jobs and prosperity, and it is entirely right that they should have been rewarded in that tangible way for so doing.

Mr. Linton: Far from it. I am not suggesting that Graham Kirkland corruptly gave money in exchange for, or in expectation of, an honour. I am saying that a system in which donors to the Conservative party are so quickly and so well rewarded is bound to encourage the provision of further funds. Indeed, who can completely exclude from his mind the possibility that that might be part of the intention?

We should also consider overseas fund raising and such people as Sir Y. K. Pao—he was a golfing partner of Sir Denis Thatcher, but I do not know whether that was his prize—and Li Ka-shing, who gave £1 million to the Conservative party and hosted dinners for the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) when he was Prime Minister. T. T. Tsui went to see the right hon. Gentleman in Downing street to discuss Hong Kong airport. C. K. Ma, whose father was—no doubt inconsiderately—imprisoned by the Taiwanese for heroin smuggling, seemed to believe, quite wrongly, that giving £1 million to the Conservative party would somehow buy his father the right to return to Hong Kong. A series of donations were clearly given in the expectation of favours. I am not suggesting that such favours were promised.

To discover where all this came from, we must look to 1976, when Lord Thorneycroft was chairman of the Conservative party and a new treasurer—Lord McAlpine, who has been quoted several times in this debate—was appointed. Having accepted Short money on behalf of the Conservative party in opposition, Lord McAlpine persuaded Lord Thorneycroft to refuse money that the Houghton committee, under the Labour Government, recommended should be given to all political parties. The Conservatives were the first party to accept Short money. Indeed, it paid for the researchers who developed what we now know as Thatcherism. The Houghton committee consequently became a dead letter, and Britain became the only country in western Europe that did not move to any system of state funding.

Refusing the Houghton committee's recommendation was on the cynical calculation that, although the Conservative party was in debt, the Labour party would be worse off if state funding were not provided. Lord Thorneycroft complained; he believed that the Conservatives must accept the Houghton money because

the party was £1.9 million in debt. That seems chicken-feed in comparison with the Conservative party's subsequent £19 million debt.

The Conservatives maintained opposition to state funding of political parties so that the Houghton committee's recommendation could never be implemented. Their calculation was right, in the sense that they always had more money than the Opposition parties, but in the end, as sources and the patience of industry in giving money waned, they had to scrape lower in the barrel, accepting overseas funding of all sorts. Such a financial strategy entirely merited—indeed, could have predicted—the election result.

Until 1997, the Labour party had no choice but to try to match Conservative spending. History will show that, as soon as this Government had the opportunity, they acted decisively to bring the arms race of escalating election spending to an end and to clean up the sleaze in our political system. If they do so with the Opposition's support, that can be described only as very welcome. Let us remember that the report is the result of a pledge that Labour made before the election. We said that we would clean up sleaze in the funding of political parties, and I do not think that anything will deflect the Government from doing so.

The parties are caught in a vice between falling incomes from their traditional sources—that applies to companies and to trade unions—rising costs of campaigning and the demand and need for more sophisticated policy research. There are only two possible consequences. We either have a slum democracy, in which parties are poorly staffed and researched and unprepared for the task of running government—contributing to expensive policy errors, such as the poll tax, which cost the country £1.5 billion—or a sleaze democracy, in which parties are forced into an unhealthy reliance on funding from private individuals, which will sooner or later compromise the parties' integrity. That is the lesson of the Ecclestone affair as much as it is of all the others that preceded it.

I very much welcome all the Neill report's proposals. Between them—disclosure of donations, a ban on overseas donations, a limit on election expenditure, ballots for companies that want to give money and tax treatment for donations—we should be able to put this sorry chapter of our history behind us for ever.

7.23 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): It has been a great privilege to serve on the Neill committee and deal with the report under the wise and skilled chairmanship of Lord Neill. It has been a fascinating exercise.

From the very first evidence we took, which was from Peter Riddell, one of our most perceptive political columnists on this and many other issues—he covered much of the field—and from our visits abroad and the interviewing of witnesses around the country, it became clear that the question was much more complex than the simple thought of disclosure and banning of foreign donations would lead one to believe. We became increasingly aware that we were dealing not just with general elections but, due to the multiplication of the number of different types of electoral systems, the onset of referendums and the technological developments we face, an on-going scene which covers a very broad field. I should like to make a few general points before I turn to our principal recommendations.

First—this is very important—the committee felt that there was very little evidence of abuse. In paragraph 4.4, we draw attention to

"The two most obvious objects which are supposed by the cynical to underlie large political donations".

They are:

"the purchase of access to Ministers (or Shadow Ministers) and the purchase of influence over policy."

It is worth getting paragraph 4.5 on the record:

"In fact, the suspicions which are entertained concerning large givers are commonly lacking in any justification. We have been given no evidence that leads us to doubt that nearly all give generously either because they support the general aims of the party which they finance, or in order to minimise the risk of the opposing party attaining power."

That is a very important comment, because it reflects the real position of British politics.

I had a fairly extensive ministerial career in various Departments, and can firmly say that on no occasion did I take a decision on policy or anything else that was based on any donation to any political party. Indeed, I did not know who the donors were. That contrasts with the situation in the United States today, and in Canada before changes in disclosure and election rules. I do not believe that there is much corruption or abuse in that area in this country, but the perception that it exists is another matter. The perception, above all, had to be dealt with.

Secondly, I have always strongly believed that politics is an honourable profession. One of the problems with regular stories suggesting possible abuse, sleaze or corruption is that they give a totally false impression of the realities of politics—exaggerating the extent of such issues. Exaggeration and concentration on such stories feed on themselves, creating a public mood.

I noticed in some of the debate and discussion in taking evidence the notion that there was somehow something tainted about being involved in politics—whether as a parliamentarian or as an active voluntary worker in the constituencies. I hope that our recommendations will eradicate that impression. They are based on the belief that politics is a wholly worthy activity, and one not to be looked at askance as though it was something shady.

I should like to put on record only two other passages of the report. In setting out the committee's approach at the beginning of the report, paragraph 2.11 says:

"The pursuit of politics is an honourable profession to which many men and women devote their lives. Behind each career politician stands a regiment of dedicated voluntary party workers."

It is very important to state that at the outset. I am sure that hon. Members across the parties would agree.

Paragraph 2.23 states:

"The argument here is that strong, healthy political parties are essential to the functioning of a strong, healthy democracy. In particular, strong and healthy parties are necessary as a means of recruiting ordinary citizens into decision-making positions at all levels of government, local as well as national, and also as a means of engaging very large numbers of people—as campaigners, activists, fund-raisers and participants in public debate—in the whole democratic process. Our view is that parties are indeed essential in this way."

[Mr. John MacGregor]

That approach coloured our thinking towards producing a package.

I was very glad that the Home Secretary—I am sorry that he is not present, but I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) will pass on one or two of my remarks—expressed precisely those sentiments recently in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). I wholly agree with them.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says, but does he accept that successive scandals in this area over the past 19 years caused that malaise in the public's view of political parties?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that those matters have been greatly exaggerated. There are perfectly good explanations for the vast majority of donations, and I hope that the committee's recommendations, and the follow-up to them, will make that apparent.

There are two points that I wish to emphasise. First, there is nothing wrong with making financial donations as an individual or as a company. Indeed, I would argue that it is necessary. We do not want politics run on a shoestring, leading to poor decisions, poor government and the discouragement of good people from coming into politics. However, donations should be out of a conviction for a cause, and not to secure personal favours in return. Secondly, it is unhealthy to the political system for a party to rely on a few large donations from wealthy people, and it is desirable to widen and assist fund-raising by more ordinary citizens. It is in that context that the committee has made some recommendations.

I wish to refer to the principal recommendations, although I shall not dwell on them at length—they are clearly laid out in the report. The key passage is the chapter on disclosure. The disclosure of donations enables everybody to see what is going on, and I think that we have got the limits right. We argued for some time over the limits of £5,000 nationally and £1,000 at constituency level, but I believe that those figures are sensible.

One matter which has not been mentioned so far is that we have made an exception of small donations under £50—the endless local contributions from wine and cheese parties, coffee mornings and raffles. Some may argue that that gives a slight loophole, but I think that the loophole is tiny. One would have to go to a lot of wine and cheese parties and raffles and make a lot of small donations to get close to the figure that we are talking about. The importance of excluding such events is twofold. First, we do not want to discourage those activities which widen the network of people who are involved in politics. Secondly, the administrative task of scrutinising and keeping records of all those small donations would be impossible.

We had a long discussion on the effect of disclosure in terms of political parties being able to raise funds. There is no clear answer. Some of the evidence from overseas suggested that, once disclosure of donations is introduced, there will be a considerable reduction in the amount of money going into the political parties. I would guess that that will happen, because some people, for perfectly honourable reasons, will be deterred from giving—when they might have given, for honourable reasons, otherwise—because they just do not want public disclosure of the fact that they are contributing to a political party.

There will be a reduction—it could be considerable—in the money going into political parties from the more wealthy donors or companies, and it is important to take that into account when we look at some of the committee's later recommendations.

As for foreign donations, we had to wrestle to work out the best definition of a "foreign donation". I personally think that we got it right, in terms of both individuals and companies. Some organisations—for example, big international lobbying organisations—may bring considerable sums of money into a political party which supports, say, an issue on animal welfare. We have put restrictions on those organisations also, because it is not just companies we need to be concerned about. I hope that we have the definition right, but it took a good deal of working out.

There is an exception for Northern Ireland in relation to disclosure of donations and foreign donations. In terms of foreign donations, the exception was made because of the Ireland Act 1949 and the Irish Republic's Electoral Act 1997. I should like to see no exceptions to the general rules in relation to disclosure or foreign donations. However, we took the view that, on security grounds—at least in the short to mid-term as far as disclosure was concerned—and on the technical grounds that I have described for foreign donations, there had to be an exception. Everyone on the committee felt that, as soon as the Government felt that the exception could be dropped on both scores the better, because it was much better to have no exceptions.

There was an argument that any exceptions in Northern Ireland for foreign donations should apply in Scotland as well. I cannot see why, as what applies in the rest of the United Kingdom should apply in Scotland as well. However, it leads to the point that there have to be good reasons for an exception in terms of foreign donations and disclosure, and we accepted that the case in Northern Ireland applied in both respects.

The committee felt from the outset that, as we moved into a more complex area, the arguments for an electoral commission were overwhelming. We could be dealing with a scene that changes much faster than in the past, and technological developments will be very important in the context of the ceilings on expenditure—about which I shall say more later. Because of the proliferation of various types of election, the issues could change. We felt that the electoral commission should have the remit not only to control how the legislation was applied in practice, but to keep reviewing whether changes were necessary in the light of the kind of developments to which I have referred.

I wish to refer now to tax relief. There is a clear recommendation in the report—which I wholly support—that the Government should look at the recommendations as a package and as a whole. There must be no cherry-picking, because the temptation may be to pick the cherry that one likes, while leaving some of the others aside. We see the process as a unity of approach. If we are to curb—as, inevitably, we will—the amount of

donations as a result of disclosure, and if we believe that an absolutely critical point of our whole approach was to encourage many more ordinary citizens to become involved in the political process and to give donations, tax relief is an important recommendation.

I would very much regret it if the Government decided that they were unable to embark on the tax relief change, because I believe that giving tax relief on donations to political parties—which are, after all, about the future of us all—is just as important and worth while as giving it on donations to charities.

Some have argued that the tax relief proposal will favour one political party over another. I do not think it will, because we have put strict limits on our recommendations on tax relief—a limit of £500, with relief limited to the basic rate. That will not help higher-rate taxpayers more than ordinary taxpayers. In addition, the argument that some people do not pay tax is not a reason for not embarking on the scheme.

I must tell the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) that we looked at tax credits as an alternative. However, the difficulty was that, in the British tax system—the evidence from the Inland Revenue was clear—tax credits would be difficult and expensive to operate, whereas the tax relief system, based on charitable donations and so on, would be much easier.

In fact, the tax relief system is much easier to operate for political parties than it is for charities. There are a multiplicity of charities which must correspond with the Inland Revenue, it being the responsibility of the charity to apply for tax relief. However, in terms of political parties, there will only be two or three mediums through which tax relief will be provided. That is why we chose that route.

Mr. Maclennan: I am interested in what the right hon. Gentleman said about taking the recommendations as a package. Did he and the committee consider the recommendation on the Short money and the aid given to parties in Parliament to be part of that package, as there has been some argument that that system favours one party over another?

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman has read my mind, as I was about to speak about Short money, which the committee regarded as very much part of the package.

I served on the Standards and Privileges Committee for a few months before the general election. I felt that blind trusts were a way to get around disclosure—if the Committee had been able to finish its work, I would have strongly objected to them. However, I understood the arguments for them—Opposition Front Benchers need more funding to carry out their activities. I have thought for a long time—I believed it when we were in government—that the Short money is inadequate. The demands on Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen in keeping themselves well informed are substantial.

Mr. Linton: The right hon. Gentleman has been, among others things, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House. Why, if he held those views, did he not introduce reforms to increase Short money then?

Mr. MacGregor: I was not under any pressure to do so. Now that the matter has come up, I am happy to make my views known. The issue was graphically brought to light when my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) went, as shadow Secretary of State for Defence, on a crucial fact-finding mission to Bosnia. He was fortunate enough to have had a lift out in a Royal Air Force plane, but the plane would not bring him back, and the Short money did not extend to paying his fare. Indeed, I am not sure how he managed to return—

Mr. Gerald Howarth: By bicycle.

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps by bicycle.

An Opposition spokesman carrying out a perfectly legitimate, and highly desirable, activity as part of his responsibility should not have to fund his trip from his private resources or from 10p or 20p donations at coffee mornings. Since Short money was introduced, political life has become much more complex, and the demands on Front-Bench spokesman have become much greater.

I hope that the Government accept the committee's recommendation to treble Short money. The committee also made detailed points about the money's distribution, but I shall not describe them now.

One of the justifications for trebling Short money is the amount that taxpayers now spend on special advisers. This year, £3.6 million, I think, is being spent on special advisers—the Government have taken on many more than we had. Those of us who have had special advisers—including, I am sure, the Home Secretary—know that a good deal of their work is political. In comparison with the £3.6 million that is spent on Government special advisers—on top of all the other resources for the Government machine and the civil service—the trebling of the Short money would be a small sum.

The hon. Member for Battersea asked why Snort money should not be given to Back Benchers from the governing party. Short money is specifically for Front-Bench activity; it is not for Opposition Back Benchers, so the committee did not believe that there was a case for extending it to Back Benchers from the governing party.

Having disagreed with the hon. Member for Battersea twice, I should add that I entirely agree with his arguments for some modest funding for political research. One of the weakest parts of the Home Secretary's speech—with the exception of all the tendentious stuff at the beginning—was the way in which he compared political research funding with the money that is spent on education and schools. That was rather cheap, and it missed the point. Short money and political research funding are important to the proper working of government and to the development of policy by any future Government. It is wrong that Opposition policy development should depend on 20p contributions at coffee mornings—proper funding would be a well-directed use of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman's admonition on my speech was fair. My mistake was to wrap up comments about Short money with comments about tax relief, which are separate issues. We have some serious considerations to make before we allow donations to

[Mr. Straw]

political parties for policy development. I accept what he says about Short money, however, having had to put up with its shortage in opposition.

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman should read what I said about tax relief, which I believe should be part of the package.

It became apparent to the committee that referendums were a key issue. I am trying to avoid being politically contentious, as that was not the committee's approach, but the evidence we received in Cardiff led me to believe that the operation of the referendum on the Welsh Assembly was outrageous. There would not have been a no campaign if it were not for the fact that a member of the Labour party had been sufficiently worried about the establishment of the Assembly to ask her bank manager for a £4,000 overdraft to start up the campaign—her courage led Robert Hodge to donate £80,000. Despite the shortage of funds, the campaign came close to being successful. We should not conduct major constitutional referendums in such a way.

The committee's recommendations on referendums are extremely important, and I hope that the Government will take them up. There are arguments for extending the remit of the electoral commission—or some other body—beyond the scrutiny of political funding in referendums, but it was not the task of the Neill committee to consider them.

Another point should be clarified. There has been some misunderstanding about what the committee meant in saying that the Government should be neutral in referendums—perhaps the point was not drafted sufficiently clearly. Of course the Government should not be prevented from expressing their views vociferously. In any referendum on proportional representation, the Government will, presumably, speak with two voices—

Mr. Straw: One.

Mr. MacGregor: I am very glad to hear it, if that voice is going to be the Home Secretary's. However, the right hon. Gentleman must concede the possibility that there will be two voices. If there are, Ministers will express their personal views, and will not expect the Government machine to back them with expenditure. The committee argued for core funding for both the yes and the no campaigns in that case.

If there is one Government view on the single currency, of course the Government should not be prohibited from expressing it. The committee's point was that the Government case should not receive double funding on such an important referendum issue. The Home Secretary mentioned Ministers taking civil servants' advice on the single currency during the campaign. That is perfectly proper, just as it is when Ministers have to take policy from civil servants during a general election campaign. The committee's concern was about expenditure and double funding.

As the hon. Member for Battersea said, I put forward a minority view on expenditure limits. I believe that disclosure is the key issue in dealing with the abuses—or perceived abuses—of the current system. I also believe that expenditure is a matter of freedom of choice and freedom of speech. In a general election, we should not constrain a party's expenditure. Indeed, that is the committee's unanimous view on referendum campaigns. At paragraph 12.47, the freedom of speech argument is adduced as a reason for not having a ceiling on referendum expenditure.

We must put in context the amount that is spent in most election campaigns. Most companies' annual expenditure on marketing and advertising for major products is more than is spent by political parties in a general election campaign, which is, none the less, a much more important matter. As Peter Riddell suggested in evidence, I do not think that a ceiling would work. There would be so many difficulties of interpretation and possibilities of abuse that, for the impact that it would have, the game would hardly be worth the candle.

It has been argued that a ceiling would prevent political parties from spending their money unwisely, but that is the responsibility of the parties themselves. We spent an awful lot of money unwisely in the 1997 general election campaign, but that was our fault, and it is not the duty of the state to save us from our faults. There is a nannyish element to such arguments.

Those are the arguments of principle and of practice that led me to the view that I reached. I am glad that there has been such a positive response to the report, and that the Home Secretary wants to legislate as soon as possible, but it is important to see the package as a whole, and to ensure that any referendums that are coming up are conducted within the framework that we set out.

7.51 pm

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): I hope to embarrass the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) by largely agreeing with him on the report's call for extra funding for policy development.

Political parties have reached a paradox, as there is general agreement that the profession of politics is held in low regard, but we need to have well-funded political parties—and especially policy development—to get out of that situation. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was absolutely right when he said that we need to distinguish clearly between policy development and campaigning or electioneering. As anyone who is familiar with political parties knows, it is perfectly possible to separate those two functions. The idea that businesses, trade unions or individuals can buy influence over policy leads to the accusations of corruption, with a small or a large "c".

I would go much further than the Neill recommendations on policy development. The arguments for state funding are best seen in continental Europe, and especially in Germany—and previously in West Germany—where part of the post-war settlement involved providing state funding for the political parties and establishing policy development bodies with taxpayers' money to act as a form of democratic guarantee. That system has served German political parties, right across the political divide, very well.

Given the low public standing of the profession of politics, I understand that taxpayers would not want their money spent on political campaigning or electioneering, but I think that the establishment of policy development bodies with state funding, on the principle that they would not accept any donations other than from the state, would afford a separation that allowed businesses, individuals

and trade unions to continue to donate money to the political party of their choice. I agree that they do that mainly for ideological reasons, and not through a desire to buy influence.

If the recommendation were accepted—I noticed that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was sceptical—it would have more far-reaching consequences than the committee may have recognised. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) that an increase in state funding is inevitable, and I would support that if it were directed towards developing policy forums or think tanks. That would radically change the role of the civil service, and especially its relationship with an incoming Government.

We need to ensure that Opposition parties are much better prepared for government when they take office. I do not want to rehearse the stereotypes of Sir Humphrey and his delaying tactics, but I believe that many of the incidents that have been cited tonight—including the Ecclestone affair—would have been avoided had the Labour party's policy development been more advanced in opposition.

I do not see why we should not be able to second civil servants, industrialists, academics and others to state-funded policy development forums, to help parties to work out policies in more detail. That would not be an abandonment of ideology, as some have argued; it would help political parties, of whatever ideology, to develop practical policies that could be implemented on coming to office.

On Short money, suffice it to say that I would welcome a huge increase in the allocation for Government Back Benchers. I sometimes think that Labour Back Benchers provide a better opposition than the official Opposition. On that basis, perhaps we should get some of the money. I will not go too far down that road, as I can imagine the Whips suggesting a link with, for example, how often we read our pagers.

I remind hon. Members of the background to the introduction of in the trade unions ballots on the political levy. I share the consensus that the ballots have by and large improved the situation. The trade unions are more accountable, and the systems are transparent. The effect was the opposite of the intention.

I believe—this is backed up by a reading of the *Hansard* reports of debates of the time—that the then Government's intention in enacting the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 was to drive a wedge between the trade unions and the Labour party, and to cut the party's funding. The expectation was that at least some trade union members would vote against affiliation; but that did not happen. In practice, the links between the unions and the party were strengthened.

Wearing my party political hat, I have a word of warning about the proposals for shareholder ballots. Recommendation 34 is fairly specific, but not specific enough for us to make a judgment on how companies would decide whether to make political donations.

There is a key difference between a company and a trade union. For trade unions, there is one member, one vote; for companies, there is to be one share, one vote—or that is how I read recommendation 34. That is very different from one shareholder, one vote. As we know, shareholding in most public limited companies is heavily biased in favour of institutional shareholders. It is conceivable that small shareholders would vote one way and the big institutions would vote another way. We need to be careful about the details of such proposals, to avoid the pendulum swinging too far. We do not want to look back in 10 or 20 years and wonder why we went so far.

One of the key principles recommended by the Neill report is to achieve greater public confidence that individuals and organisations do not buy influence in political parties. There has been controversy in my constituency for some time about the administration of the Melton Medes pension fund. I hope that the House will bear with me on this practical example, because it illustrates the urgent need for the implementation of the majority of the Neill committee's report.

The scheme has been subject to accusations of bullying and maladministration. The female workers in the factory have been forced, under threat of dismissal—this has been admitted by the chairman of the trustees—to sign contracts that postpone their retirement age from 60 to 65. There are allegations of intimidation against some of the members of the pension fund.

That may be of little interest to the House. However, the chairman of Melton Medes, Mr. Nat Puri, is listed in the Register of Members' Interests as a major donor to the campaign of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) for the leadership of the Conservative party. He is also listed in the Labour party accounts as a major donor to the Labour party. The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority and the Financial Services Authority have failed to order investigations into the administration of the pension fund. The members of the fund—the existing work force and the current pensioners—are very sceptical about the power of the financial watchdogs and the political process after the injustice that has taken place.

I am not suggesting that the Labour party, its Ministers or the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe are in any way involved in the events that I have described—indeed, I know that they are unaware of them. However, that does not reassure the members of the pension fund. Greater transparency and greater accountability are required.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Given what the hon. Gentleman has just said about what he is not alleging, what is his point? What is the connection between donations to any political party and the administration of the pension fund that he is talking about?

Mr. Woolas: My point is that in this case—and, I believe, in many others—the members of the pension fund have lost faith in the political party system, because they believe that both parties have failed to protect their interests. The disclosure of the donations by the company looks pretty raw, given the effects of the decisions of that company. I want more transparency, to reassure the members of that pension fund that there has been no untoward activity. I believe there has been none, but they do not share my view.

I was a senior manager in an affiliated trade union for several years, and have been on the receiving end of many requests for donations to the Labour party—and, on a couple of occasions, to other parties. My experience is that the trade unions suffer from the accusation that they are buying policy, just as much as the Labour party does. It is a two-way relationship.

[Mr. Woolas]

That is why an increase in state funding for policy development would benefit not just the Opposition parties, but the party of government, currently the Labour party, and the trade unions. The trade unions would be free to carry on giving money for leaflets, stickers and posters, up to whatever limit is set—£15 million or £20 million have been suggested—but there could be no accusation that policy was being influenced by donations or affiliations in any political party. That would improve our political process, providing modern, professional political parties and better policy, thereby serving the public much better than the current system.

8.6 pm

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I shall be brief and non-partisan—brief because the issues are fairly simple, and non-partisan because it is difficult for a party of one to be partisan, just as it is difficult for a party of one to qualify for Short money, although, as the party leader, I would not mind if the rules changed.

I have an interest to declare. The debate concerns broad issues of trust and confidence in the democratic process, which propelled me, rather to my surprise, into Parliament. In my written and oral evidence to the committee, I suggested a national campaign spending limit for parties of £2 million each. The committee went for a higher figure. That much money cannot be raised on the rubber chicken circuit, because there are not enough rubber chickens or party members with the stomach to digest them, so it will have to be raised by other means. Some of it will come from big contributors, which gets us again into the grey area of whether we are selling and buying influence or selling and buying access.

I welcome the imposition of limits, just as I welcome the recommendations on referendums. The Home Secretary had an opportunity in the debate to accept that an independent mechanism will be necessary for the conduct of referendums. I have entered into a single-issue and very short-term alliance with the Conservative party on this, which I am sure will not spread to other issues. We are backed in our campaign for a real referendum by Charter 88, the Electoral Reform Society and, I think, the majority of the British people, who cannot accept that the Government can be umpire and player on the same field. There is a question of legitimacy. When a referendum is over, the losing side has to accept that it was fairly conducted. That was part of the problem with the Welsh referendum.

The public will not allow any more public money for political parties—money that could otherwise be spent on schools and hospitals. It is up to the parties to fire up enthusiasm and match the idealism of the young with the idealism of the not so young. They have to generate support to get a lot of small contributions. I have perhaps a unique experience in politics, after an incident last January involving a tabloid newspaper. I found that I had to pay £9,400 in legal fees, which I had not known I owed. People started sending me the money, so I have experience of running a fund lowering campaign. If any party wants to draw on that experience, I shall be happy to help it out.

The issue of honours is important. In the companion volume to the report, the most fascinating evidence of all is that given on 13 May by Lord Pym, the chairman of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, when he addressed the issue whether there was any link at all between contributing to party funds and the award of honours. I had expected him to say that there was absolutely none, and that that would occur under no circumstances and over his dead body. What he actually said was:

"On the whole, the principle we follow is that if somebody gives their money to a political party, that is a bonus point rather than a minus because they are supporting what they believe in with their own money . . . Our responsibility is to look at the totality of the contribution made by individuals and weigh them all together. Donations may be one aspect of their achievements; it may be a minor one, but it is an aspect."

Donations are an achievement? Signing a cheque is an achievement? That seems to me to be both a corruption of the language and a corruption of politics. If Lord Pym really believes that, if he has not changed his mind, if he has been correctly transcribed, and if words have the meaning that they appear to have, he should step aside. If any other member of his committee believes the same, he or she too should step aside, so that their positions can be filled by people who would place an absolute and unbreachable fire wall between donations and the award of honours. It is a matter of integrity, and of trust in government. People care about that. I hope that the Minister will address that point.

8.11 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas) said that the best opposition came from the Back Benches, and he may have heard me say from a sedentary position that that is not unusual. Back Benchers are the backbone of parties. They are the folk who go out to fight and to argue in the streets. They know the Government's policy, and they are the first to detect the rapid shifts that occur as soon as an Opposition become the Government. That is why they, being tied to the true faith, become the most devastating critics of the Government. Perhaps they are not as vocal early in a Parliament as they will later become, but let me assure the hon. Gentleman that, with the majority that his party has, it will happen. I have seen it all before.

My first point is about the nature of the political party. I am on the same footing as the Home Secretary and several others in believing that political parties should seek a mass membership. If the membership is big enough, and if it is supported by relatively small membership fees—I am against large fees—it will be followed by fund raising, canvassing, and much more, as naturally as day follows night. I am against the idea of a political elite receiving large sums of money from public funds so that it can run elections and Governments by buying space in newspapers and time on the other media. That would be totally wrong, and would be destructive of the democratic principle. We should stay as far from it as we can.

The Home Secretary said that he would write to ask for representatives from each major party. What does he consider to be a major party? A major party in one part of the United Kingdom, such as his own Labour party, can be totally non-existent in another part, as his is in my Province. I hope that he will bear that in mind.

The report mentions £5,000 for donations. That seems a reasonable sum, not too big and not too small. State funding should be given only through the Short money.

I find it repugnant that any political party should look to the public purse for money to run its operations in its headquarters, in the House or in the country. If we are to offer money, it should be done strictly for parliamentary purposes. The Short money was created for that reason, and that is how it should be used.

The Home Secretary, in setting out his views, did not refer at all to Northern Ireland. That was left to the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). The Opposition's Front-Bench spokesman did not mention Northern Ireland, and nor did the Liberal Democrat spokesman. We have been told that there should be openness regarding money for elections and so on. I have glanced through the large report—we do not have time to read all the reports that land on our desks—and hon. Members will understand that I concentrated on the Northern Ireland section.

I read the concerns expressed by the Social Democratic and Labour party, and the reference to the wishes of its supporters to remain incognito. I well understand that desire. A brick, or worse, through the window, attacks on one's children, and threats and intimidation are not common on this side of the Irish sea, but we have to live with them. That said, I believe that anyone prepared to put forward a political point of view must be prepared to defend it in every forum and against every enemy. For that reason, I diminish the comments of the SDLP about concerns for the safety of its people, although those concerns are perhaps greater even than those of other political parties in Northern Ireland.

The strange position of the Irish Republic was mentioned by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk, and is set out in the report, beginning at page 75. Under the Ireland Act 1949, the Irish Republic and its citizens enjoy a peculiar position in British law. The Republic itself maintains a wide definition of who is an Irish citizen or national. We must take those two things into account.

Paragraph 5.38 agrees that nationals of the Irish Republic are not really foreigners because of the 1949 Act. Paragraph 5.39 says:

"it would be virtually impossible to halt the flow of funds from the Dublin offices of the SDLP or Sinn Fein".

The Home Secretary must realise that halting and policing are not the same thing. They should not be treated as lightly as the report treats them. It is crazy to license one or two parties in the United Kingdom to raise money by such means, and to accept donations from such sources, without our giving the same licence to all parties. That position is not sustainable. If any of the major parties cared to go to the European Court of Human Rights, the Government might find themselves in major difficulty.

My concern is increased by the fact that there are difficulties in some people's minds about the source of some IRA-Sinn Fein money. There are allegations of drug dealing, of robbery, of rackets, of intimidation and of protection money, to name just a few. The public manifestation of Messrs Adams, McGuinness and others going to the United States for $500-a-plate dinners and other fund raising is also hard to tackle. We would be remiss, however, in not attempting to tackle those problems. We cannot turn a blind eye to them. We must investigate them, and we must have answers. If we are to allow money to be handed out willy-nilly, the handout must be policed.

Who is it who tries to conceal the sources of its money? Only one party does—Sinn Fein-IRA. That party is no friend of the democratic principle, and we should not connive at allowing it to get away with, literally, the murder, intimidation and violence that it uses to raise some of its funds. We must ask serious questions, and we must police carefully the sources of that party's funding. We need to know. Nothing frightens the evildoer as much as the spotlight of publicity shining into the darkest corners of his behaviour. That is a dark corner of those people's behaviour, let us get a searchlight on to it as soon as possible.

I do not hold referendums in high favour, for a number of reasons, not least that the Government always set the question, which has a great effect on the outcome. Under the Northern Ireland (Border Poll) Act 1972, which has been repealed, the question was, "Do you want Northern Ireland to become part of the Irish Republic?" and about 97 per cent. of the people said no.

In the last referendum in Northern Ireland, the question on the ballot paper was not the issue. Essentially, the question was, "Do you want peace?" What fool wants war? It was a classic case of misdirection, as the real question was, "Do you want the IRA in government?" Of course, that issue never really surfaced. As a result of that affair, I am of the opinion that equal funds should be available to both sides of the argument, and that it is equally important to allow a much longer period to sell the case.

Mrs. Laing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the problem of the wording of the question in a referendum could be solved if an electoral or independent commission were given the power to scrutinise the way in which it was worded, and if that power were taken away from the Government?

Mr. Ross: One can build in such safeguards until the cows come home, but the best referendum is a general election. No matter how many safeguards one builds in, the Government will eventually see to it that their will carries the day when it comes to the question asked. I have been in this place long enough to be highly suspicious of safeguards, as I know how weak they normally are.

There are all sorts of problems. The Government of the day are to be neutral, but their members may campaign. There will be associated costs. The Government's position has already been mentioned in the debate. Whenever one goes down the road of a referendum, one finds that the Government manage to promote their ideas through the question. If the referendum has the authority of the Government behind it—the power of Government with the media and so forth—the result is a foregone conclusion. It will be what the Government desire it to be.

Another little problem is that, under our system, no Parliament can bind its successor. Referendums are an attempt to bind a successor Parliament, which is another good reason for not going down that road. However, a successor Government could overturn the result of a referendum if they had the guts, because power lies not with referendums but with the majority in this House. No Member of this House should allow that power to be taken away from us.

We should consider carefully the Government's role in the Northern Ireland referendum this year. Hon. Members have referred to the Welsh referendum, and I know of the hullabaloo associated with it. Most people in Great Britain took little notice of the arguments advanced during the

[Mr. Ross]

Northern Ireland referendum campaign, but large gobs of Government money were expended. As far as I am aware, the figures have never been given. Perhaps the Minister will be able to tell me where I can find those sums in the Northern Ireland Government accounts. Where are they set out clearly? How can I find out which parties expended what money?

I noticed from the evidence given by the president of my party that we received some donations from the Irish Republic to fight the referendum. Since the party and I were of divided opinions in that matter, I would be interested to know who the individual donors were. Was it the Joseph Rowntree Foundation or one of those wealthy multimillionaires who inhabit the Irish Republic and who are always so willing to buy Northern Ireland businesses and so forth? I think that we deserve to be told. It is not merely the general public who want to know where the money comes from in referendum campaigns and party political politicking. I suspect that many Back Benchers on both sides of the House want to know because it would give us a clearer idea of the real forces that drive both Front Benches.

The leaked letter from Mr. Tom Kelly, the spin doctor in the Northern Ireland Office, listed all the people whom the Government machine in Northern Ireland had to influence. The Government did not deny it, but simply complained to high heaven about the leak. Judging by the way in which some of the individuals and elements named in the letter have behaved since, it is plain to those of us who take an interest in such matters that the pressures of Mr. Kelly and the Government had the desired effect. Since the Conservative party is apparently to publish its accounts for this year and last, perhaps the Government will publish the accounts of expenditure on the referendums in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We want to see clearly what the sums were.

I could say much more on the subject, but will let that suffice. I have a number of concerns about the way in which the whole affair has been handled. We need more openness and fairness, and we also need much more forthrightness from Governments of all parties.

8.26 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). A familiar cry in some Irish elections is, "Vote early, vote often." Not long ago during the passage of a certain Bill, it was not clear when the Divisions would occur and I sought advice from my former private secretary at the Northern Ireland Office, who was sitting in the Box. He told me that there would be no Divisions until long into the evening, but that we would then vote frequently. I said that that was one of those rare instances of "Vote late, vote often."

In the interests of brevity, I will not comment in detail on any of the 100 recommendations in the report, which I welcome. I do not accept Northern Ireland as a deliberate exclusion, as the position in that respect applies to all the other recommendations.

As a former chairman of the Conservative party, I declare an interest. Until our party conference a month ago, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) became chairman, 10 members of both Houses had served as party chairmen since we won the general election in 1979—one did so twice. Three other ex-chairmen are still Members of the House. One of them, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), opened the debate for the official Opposition, to which the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) alluded.

With 10 chairmen in 19 years, my term in office from November 1987 to July 1989 was about par for the course, although my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield was less than personally helpful when he said in his opening remarks that the Home Secretary had concentrated on events a decade ago, which to my unmathematical mind puts them neatly and precisely in the middle of my term of office.

The hon. Member for Battersea said that he looked forward to my contribution, and I can shed light on one aspect of the Neill report—recommendation 45 on by-election expenditure. A footnote on page 111, on paragraph 10.5, refers to the special rate of expenditure for by-elections being introduced in 1989. Those of us with any exposure to by-elections before the 1989 legislation knew that there was an element of fiction to all parties' returns of by-election expenditure, but that agents were the only actors in the piece who were liable to a gaol sentence if the return was successfully questioned. It was clearly not possible that that should go on, but legislation had to have all-party support.

My right hon. Friend Lord Hurd of Westwell, then Home Secretary, delegated to me the task of negotiating with the shadow Home Secretary, Lord Hattersley, who in turn deputed negotiation to Joyce Gould, as she then was, in Walworth road on the basis that, if it was all right with her, it would be all right with him. We in turn reached agreement. I note that the task of reaching agreement was given to an officer and an official of the two party headquarters. Although a fair number of contributors to this debate have metaphorically held their noses about party headquarters, that Shakespearean standby, the second murderer, can have his or her uses upon a noble stage.

The Home Secretary, in a speech only marginally flawed by partiality, attributed to the past two decades the palm for improper political finance in our history. I thought that he was a little forgetful of the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1832, that great year in our parliamentary history, 850 out of the 1,000 voters in Stamford were bribed. If I had been one of the 150, I would have wondered what was wrong with me. Between 1832 and 1857, 443 petitions to invalidate parliamentary elections were mounted and 75 were sustained. In 1880, there were 42 petitions after the general election, of which 16 in England were successful; eight led to the appointment of royal commissions, and seven towns were temporarily disfranchised.

Even in this century, I thought that the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) was over-pious in forgetting that notorious tout for honours, Maundy Gregory, the subject of three biographies from which one can distil a description of him as an actor cum secret service informer cum suspected murderer. Lloyd George, who was Prime Minister but not leader of his party, derived a war chest

of £1.5 million in 1920s sterling from those activities. I cannot blame Lloyd George for giving an earldom—for providing him with £200,000—to Lord Farquhar.

Mr. Skinner: You can say that again.

Mr. Brooke: An earldom to Lord Farquhar. It was an absent-minded transfer, at a time when Lord Farquhar was treasurer of the Conservative party. I suspect that the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) may have forgotten the industrialist who gave Ramsay MacDonald in his first premiership the interest from £40,000 and the use of a Daimler, and who, coincidentally, received a baronetcy shortly afterwards.

Ironically, the sale of honours between the 1890s and the 1920s did much to enervate the local efforts of the Liberal party. Without wishing to intrude on private grief, I suspect that one of the reasons for my party's recent retreat in the English metropolitan boroughs, where we now hold six seats out of 124, owes much to over-reliance on business funding and a reduction in the number of businesses still controlled within the cities where they were once headquartered.

I have quoted before in the House the instructions received at my mother's knee never to jog backwards, although she rendered it more felicitously. There has been talk of damascene conversions in the Opposition. For myself, recalling my mother's instructions, I welcome the committee's recommendations unreservedly. I was sorry not to draw from the Home Secretary precisely which recommendations he did not accept. The loose language of soundbites had alluded to accepting the main thrust of the recommendations or, in his language today, the main findings. I infer from the phrase "accepting the main thrust" that the less attractive recommendations fell into something that I described to the Leader of the House two and a half weeks ago as the lesser thrust. So far, the precise detail of the lesser thrust has not been vouchsafed to us.

The Government must be careful in taunting us on any delay in disclosure, to which we are already committed. In return for the official Opposition's acceptance of the recommendations in their entirety, we are promised a draft Bill next summer. I may be doing the Home Secretary an injustice, but I did not pick up whether the delay in legislation is because of drafting difficulties or the scale of the rest of the Government's business programme, which would send a message about the Government's sense of priority on these issues.

The Corrupt Practices (Suspension of Elections) Act 1883 was provoked by the experiences of the 1880 general election and was an outstanding success, which we would like to see reflected in post-Neill legislation. Between 1874 and 1880, Conservative central office spent nothing, while Conservative candidates at elections spent £500,000 in 1870s sterling. Declared candidates' expenditure in 1880 was £41 million at 1980s prices. In 1885, it fell to £28 million and in 1886 to £19 million. At 1980s prices, it went back above £30 million only twice between 1886 and today—ironically, in 1906 and 1910.

Not only was candidates' expenditure cut, but the habit of constituency associations was formed in the 1880s and 1890s. After the 1883 legislation, in the words of an historian of British political finances,

"the cut in permitted spending led directly to the growth of political participation."

My father served on the Maxwell Fyfe commission during the 1945 to 1950 Parliament, which gave rise to Lord Woolton's switch from individual Members of Parliament funding the party locally to the greater energy of more widely based associations. Out of crises, I say to Conservative Members, can come opportunities.

Finally, I want to express in a bouquet of unreserved welcomes to the Neill committee a particularly unreserved welcome to its referendum rules and how it reached them. There has in some aspects of what I think the Labour party calls "the project" been some evidence of lack of preparation. As a strategic planning professor once taught me at the Harvard business school, "If you do not know where you are trying to get to, any road will get you there." That observation may reasonably be applied to the Government's approach to the serried referendums and their rules, as the Neill committee mentioned. When we press for universal referendum rules, junior Ministers in charge of Bills have regarded that as outside their remits. We are in the Neill committee's debt for having produced such rules.

8.36 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): It is a difficult task to follow the excellent, elegant elucidation by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) of this difficult subject. Last week, I introduced a Bill to set up an election commission with powers over the conduct and financing of referendums. The Minister looks surprised. It was a ten-minute Bill.

Mr. George Howarth: I am sorry if I gave the hon. Lady the wrong impression. I was simply nodding in recognition of the fact that she had introduced such a Bill.

Mrs. Laing: I thank the Minister for clarifying that. I thought that the Government had not noticed.

The main effect of my Bill would be to implement the recommendations of the Neill report. I thought that the Government had not noticed it, because they did not oppose it, although there was every opportunity to do so. No Labour Member opposed it. I had hoped that the inference to be drawn from the failure to oppose it was that the Government were in favour of its provisions. Sadly, it seems from what the Home Secretary said that that is not the case.

The Home Secretary was not clear about the Government's attitude to Lord Neill's recommendations on referendums. He said that the chapter on referendums needed careful consideration. We have learnt to interpret the Government saying that a matter needs careful consideration to mean that the matter will take a very long time to consider, and that they will effectively kick it into touch. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster will tell me whether, not being a rugby expert, I have misunderstood the sporting metaphor, but I believe that kicking something into touch means delay, delay and more delay. Why do the Government want to play for time on such an urgent issue? We have to regulate the conduct of referendums soon, because there could be another referendum at any minute.

A referendum is not a mere opinion poll, to be used at the whim of the Government of the day. The matters that are likely to be put to a referendum in the near future are

[Mrs. Laing]

far too serious to be treated in the way that the present Government—or, indeed, any Government—treat opinion poll results, by spinning them in the media to their own advantage. There is a threat of referendums on several important subjects, such as whether there should be a fundamental change to our voting system, whether the pound should be merged with the euro and whether the composition of Parliament itself should be altered. It is incredible—unbelievable—that the Government are willing to conduct referendums on such fundamental aspects of our democratic system, but unwilling to entrench that process of consultation in a properly determined framework.

The Home Secretary today showed the Government's acceptance of the Neill committee's recommendation that an election commission be set up to regulate elections. Apparently it is right that we should have further regulation of elections, but no regulation of referendums. Where is the logic in that? Perhaps the Minister will answer that question. The Government are saying that elections must be fair, but that it is not necessary for referendums to be fair. Would anyone, on either side of the House, argue that referendums do not have to be conducted fairly? If not, we have to ask ourselves what lies behind the Government's reluctance to accept the Neill committee's proposals. Of what are the Government afraid? Why do they want to retain a biased system?

The referendum in Wales has been mentioned many times today, but hon. Members will not be surprised to learn that I shall refer to the referendum in Scotland. First, I shall quote the evidence to the Neill committee of Mr. Raymond Robertson, a former Member of Parliament, who is now chairman of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party. He said:

"The Government was a player on one side of the referendum. The Government were campaigning for a yes vote. The Prime Minister came to Scotland twice. The Secretary of State for Scotland led the yes campaign. They were able to write the rules and an information leaflet and to send it out to every house. I think that is fundamentally unfair in a free society."

I agree.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Is the hon. Lady not concerned that the Scottish Conservative party has still not come to terms with the fact that the people of Scotland are getting the Parliament they want? The fact that Mr. Robertson complained in that manner serves only to confirm that the Conservative party in Scotland continues to be out of touch with the wishes of the Scottish people.

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman could not be more wrong, and I cannot deny his remarks vehemently enough. My argument is not about the result of the referendum in Scotland. I am the first to admit that, no matter what rules applied or how much money was spent by any and all sides in the referendum campaign, the result would have been the same. The result was overwhelmingly in favour of what the Government, the Scottish National party and the Liberal Democrats had argued, and I am not challenging that result. However, since the hon. Gentleman has made the point, I have to answer it: the Conservative party in Scotland is now campaigning to win seats in the new Scottish Parliament, and is working to make that Parliament work. I may be sceptical about whether that Parliament can ever work, but that is not the issue this evening.

I am fair, and I believe in putting both sides of the argument; therefore, having quoted Mr. Robertson, I shall tell the House what the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office told the Neill committee. He said:

"We tried very hard indeed to achieve objectivity, in that the words would carry meaning in terms of significance, but no hint of advocacy that 'If you do this on 11 September, Scotland will be some nirvana afterwards.' But you are right: it is a difficult process."

The Minister was absolutely right: it is a difficult process to achieve that objectivity. In fact, it is impossible for any Government, no matter what their political colours, to achieve it. That is why we need fair funding for fair referendums.

The Home Secretary has considered the reasoned plea for real referendums, a campaign that has the support of hon. Members from all parties in the House and, indeed, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), whom the Conservatives were pleased to welcome to the campaign, although we understand that he does not want to join us in all our campaigns. It also has the support of several Members of another place, the Electoral Reform Society, Charter 88, the Constitution Unit and the Institute for Constitutional Research.

We have called for, first, the establishment of an independent commission. The role of such a commission could be carried out by the electoral commission which the Home Secretary has welcomed as part of Lord Neill's recommendations. Secondly, we want the commission to report within three months on a clear set of rules to govern the conduct and financing of referendums. That is a matter of urgency, as I hope the Minister recognises. There are many matters to be examined and clarified: for example, as the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) mentioned, the wording of the question asked in a referendum, what constitutes a sufficient majority and who is eligible to vote in a referendum. That last question was raised during the referendums in Scotland and Wales, but Ministers never answered it; they simply sidestepped it.

Those referendums are now behind us, but the question remains for future referendums. It is ludicrous that, in Scotland, leaflets about the referendum were printed in Cantonese because people who had just come from China to reside in Scotland and to do a good job working in Chinese restaurants there had a right to vote in the referendum on the future constitutional position in Scotland. People from China had the right to vote, but soldiers serving in Scottish regiments who were temporarily resident in England because of their work in the British Army were not allowed to vote. That is iniquitous. It is simply not fair. It is one of the many matters that should be dealt with and ruled on by an independent commission before we have another debacle during a so-called consultation of the people.

The third thing for which the campaign for real referendums has called is that no referendum should be held in future except one that is conducted in accordance with the rules laid down by the commission. The Electoral Reform Society has called that a level playing field for referendums. What could be the motive of any hon. Member who purports to uphold democracy, but who wants referendums to be conducted other than on a fair

and level playing field? A referendum must not only be fair, but be seen to be fair, so that its result is accepted by all sides, winners and losers, and by everyone who is affected by its outcome. That is why the rules must be clear, obvious and properly constituted. Campaigns must also be fairly funded. That unarguable truth leads inevitably to the necessity for public core funding, which the Neill committee also correctly recommended in its excellent report.

It is absurd and indefensible that in this sophisticated information age, in which our democratic system conducts general elections according to strict rules—that is one reason why ours is one of the oldest and most stable democracies in the world—we have, over the past year, condoned a situation in which the Government have been able to spend taxpayers' money promoting one side of a referendum campaign. By not accepting the Neill committee's recommendations today, the Government and all Labour Members are continuing to condone that unfair situation. That point cannot be argued; it is obviously unfair and therefore undemocratic.

Lord Neill has recommended simply:

"The government of the day in future referendums should, as a government, remain neutral and should not distribute at public expense literature, even purportedly 'factual' literature, setting out or otherwise promoting its case."

That is such a reasonable recommendation that it is difficult to understand why the Government have not accepted it with alacrity and enthusiasm. Indeed, that recommendation is the essence of democracy. The Government cannot wriggle out of that, and every Member who defends democracy should now call on the Government to implement the Neill committee's proposals on fair referendums. If that is not done swiftly, the Government must, at the very least, immediately undertake to hold the next referendum according to those proposals.

8.51 pm

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): We welcome the conclusions of the Neill report, and accept all its recommendations, particularly that on national limits on campaign expenditure. As the report points out, that is in the spirit of the original 19th-century legislation, which first introduced upper levels on electoral expenditure.

We have all seen the ridiculous spectacle of candidates drawing up their return of election expenses, perhaps checking whether they sent somebody a telegram and working out the results to the last penny, while they are surrounded by hundreds of thousands of pounds-worth of expenditure by national party campaigns, none of which has been accounted for in any way and which dwarfs into insignificance expenditure by individual candidates.

We should be grateful that we are in danger of being saved from ourselves and from following the example of the United States, where year after year election expenditure has increased and the only effect has been to reduce the electoral turnout and increase apathy and disillusionment with the political process. Lord Neill touches on that point.

I welcome the committee's suggestions of corresponding limits of £1.5 million for the Scottish Parliament elections and limits for third parties who may be involved in election campaign funds. As of last month, all the Scottish parties have stated their willingness to stick with those limits even in advance of legislation to enforce the recommendations.

I have to confess that, for my party, stopping short of the £1.5 million expenditure limit may not prove to be an insurmountable problem. However, I am concerned that some of our opponents have not spelt out precisely how they will stick to the suggested limit, and we need an urgent meeting between the Scottish parties to agree the precise interpretation of Lord Neill's recommendations. I am sorry that there are no Scottish Labour Members here to confirm their acceptance of those proposals. Perhaps they are preparing for a long night on Wednesday, when we shall discuss the Scotland Bill.

My main concern is that third parties who are involved in the election might not limit their expenditure. By third parties I mean not political parties but those who are involved in campaigning. Already, Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union has been on a day trip to Scotland. He said that his union would campaign all out against independence. In an election for a Scottish Parliament, that is effectively campaigning for the Labour party and against the Scottish National party. Scottish National party Members want to know whether the TGWU and any other organisation that intends to get involved in the campaign will stick to the spirit of the Neill report and limit their expenditure.

That leads me to the recommendation that sources of funding should be limited to those who are entitled to vote and UK-based organisations. Scottish National party Members are happy to accept that. The logic of that carried through to Scottish elections would mean that only those who are entitled to vote in those elections and only Scottish organisations should contribute to the funding of campaigns for the Scottish Parliament. I am greatly concerned that organisations from outside Scotland would get involved in the next Scottish election or in a future referendum in Scotland. I am certain that, if any such organisation were to be involved, its motivation would not be to support the Scottish National party or further the cause of independence.

I am concerned also about the effects of Government information campaigns, which have been mentioned by other hon. Members. Recommendation 89 of the Neill report deals with that in relation to referendums, but I am particularly concerned about the forthcoming information campaign for the Scottish Parliament elections and the need to explain the new voting system. The Government plan a budget of £2 million to explain the voting method for the Scottish Parliament. At a press conference to announce that expenditure, the Secretary of State for Scotland said that he was concerned to explain to the people that the purpose of the second ballot is not to allow voters a second choice.

Hon. Members will remember that the first ballot is for the constituency seat and the second is for the regional lists, which are to be used to top up the membership of the Parliament to make it more proportional. The Secretary of State was apparently worried that some Labour voters might view the second ballot as an opportunity to express their second choice, which he feared might be the Scottish National party. Some of us think that the Secretary of State should be more worried about the fact that the SNP might be the first choice of some voters. However, I do not think that that falls into the category of legitimate information.

[Mr. Alasdair Morgan]

The legislation does not refer to the intention of a particular ballot, but alludes only to its outcome. Voters have a perfect right to interpret how a particular ballot is used and the reasons why it is used. On the basis of that argument, it might be possible for the Government to run an information campaign under the existing system declaring that the purpose of the ballot is not to allow tactical voting. That is why I have grave concerns about public information campaigns.

I welcome recommendation 17 of the Neill committee report, which states that it is an offence to discriminate against someone on the basis of his or her contribution to a political party. That provision might have come into effect earlier this year when the Scottish Office executed a volte face over the granting of a knighthood to Sean Connery when it discovered that he had donated money to the Scottish National party.

Recommendation 41 regarding Short money suggests not trebling Short money—that is recommendation 40, which I also welcome—but conducting a general review of Short money and examining the particular difficulties that affect smaller parties, which must deal with the same policy issues as larger parties but which receive little support from Short money in the form of research funding. I welcome that recommendation.

In conclusion—unusually, I find myself in agreement with the Opposition—I think that we need legislation in order to implement the Neill committee's recommendations in full as soon as possible. To some extent, the Government's reputation depends on their willingness to do that. Labour made much noise—particularly before the general election—about the system and the way in which it was being misused by the then Government. We now have a means of reforming the system, and it behoves the Government to implement the report in full at an early date.

9 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): This is one report by the do-gooders—the chattering classes—with which I agree. I support quite a number of the Neill committee's recommendations. The committee was established principally because there was so much financial sleaze that someone needed to step in. A list of proposals was put to the Neill committee with which I could not help but agree. I remember well standing here at the time of the Ecclestone affair—I think that was what it was called—and telling the Prime Minister that every adversity creates an opportunity.

I suggested to the Prime Minister that day that we should cap national spending in general elections. I proposed a figure, and the Neill committee—its members are a bit posher than me—has gone a bit higher. I said that, since major parties spend about £6 million financing 600-odd Labour and Tory candidates, that should be the official figure. If that is the amount that is spent in constituencies, an equivalent figure should be spent nationally. I think that that would help to clean up the political equivalent of the Augean stables.

As has already been said, we have had another basinful in the mid-term elections in the United States. A candidate named Feingold in Wisconsin stood for election to the Senate. He declared that he would not take any so-called "soft" money, and he only just made it. Despite the fact that he was supported by all kinds of people, he nearly lost the election—he won by only a very narrow margin—because his opponent was able to spend a vast amount of money on his campaign. The sooner we take hold of this problem, the better.

I am quite enthused that the Tory party now thinks that the Neill committee's recommendations are great. It was not so long ago that the Tory Government would not even contemplate considering such issues. It is a little fanciful of the Tory party to go on about referendum campaigns, expenditure equality and the rest of it in an attempt to create the impression that the Labour party and this Government are dragging their feet purely and simply because of the referendum issue. I remember what happened in 1975, when—I have said this many times—those in favour of Britain remaining in the common market spent 10 times as much money campaigning as those of us who opposed them. The truth is that we would have lost anyway.

The turning point of that referendum campaign was the moment when the Prime Minister of the day, Harold Wilson—who had sat on the fence for God knows how long, saying, "On one hand this, but on the other that"—decided to jump off the fence and join those who were campaigning for a yes vote. I believe that that was the most significant thing that happened in that campaign. I kicked up merry hell about the £10 million, or whatever it was, that was spent, and I said that it was wrong that everyone had a little booklet shoved through their letter box; but in my heart, I know that that was the key decision.

In a referendum campaign on the euro, I expect the Government to put their case, and I expect different people to have different points of view. In case the Whips are listening, I point out that I declared in my general election manifesto:

"I shall vote against a single currency."

That document was not printed by Millbank or the appropriate region of the Labour party; I did it myself. I did it because I thought, "Who knows? They might have a bit of a referendum some day or other, and I had better get my position clear." I regard that as more important than the money that the Tories keep talking about in the debate. In my view, that document gives me more backing than all the finances that anyone could talk about, because I have told my constituents the score.

I must say to everyone, including the Tories, that the referendum on the euro is already being softened up. You don't need to be an Einstein to realise what is happening. All the talk about equality in the amounts to be spent on the referendum is phoney, because anyone who is watching the signs knows that there is a lot of activity now—including among members of the Tory party, who are being lined up in all sorts of ways. The previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), is being lined up for this, that and the other. I hear that Chris Patten is going to be a European Commissioner; and the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) has been given a job in China.

Shona McIsaac: Send him.

Mr. Skinner: He is being sent in. I envisage that that softening-up process will continue in the next 12 months.

I rest secure in the knowledge that I shall vote against the euro on principle, irrespective of how many people are wooed from the Tory party, the Liberal party and so on. The referendum on the euro may be a close contest. I do not think that the result will be as clear-cut as the vote against proportional representation.

There will be no referendum on PR this side of a general election. The Liberal Democrats should get that into their noddles: even if they sit on Cabinet Committees and so on, the chance of a referendum before a general election has gone. When the leader of the Liberal Democrats went on "The Frost Programme" the other Sunday morning, he blew the gaff. He said to all the other Liberal Democrats, in as many words, "I'm going to let you down." It is time that they got rid of him, if that is how strongly he feels. He has already said that there will not be a referendum on PR before the next election.

That brings me back to the issue of finances. I do not believe that finances can be decisive if the referendum on PR is held on the tinpot proposals advanced by Lord Jenkins. He has a cheek, has he not, to talk about regulating our voting system when he is in the other place for life? He need not submit himself to the vote in any fashion. There is a strong body of opinion—which I do not believe money can change—against PR.

The House will have gathered by now that, unlike the Liberal Democrats, I do not go a bundle on referendums. It so happens that we made a manifesto pledge. Unlike on some more important issues, I shall not have to walk the plank on it. Nevertheless, I expect to cast my vote in the House in accordance with what I believe. In some cases I shall vote in accordance with my constituents' views and in some cases—especially on the monarchy—I shall probably vote against the views of a majority of my constituents, but I always expect to vote in accordance with what I believe. That is what I am sent to this place to do.

The referendum issue will not be changed by the issue of money. The question is whether it can be sold to the public, and on PR I do not believe that it can. On the euro—that is a different matter.

I welcome the fact that the Neill committee has presented its proposals, which will stop all those foreign donations. The Tories will not get money from the Chinese communists or the Cypriots. They will get no more money from Asil Nadir, and none from Greece and other places. I welcome that. It is almost as though I had sat on that committee, which has come up with such great proposals. Incidentally, I helped to write the Labour party's proposals when I was on the NEC, and almost all of them have been accepted by Lord Neill and the rest of the committee.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) will have to do something about the referendum issue to satisfy the whims of Opposition Members and others. I do not accept that the Tory party has a case when it argues that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and others are holding back because they are frightened of that issue.

The package of recommendations as a whole is a big advance. If it helps to halt the trend towards what is happening over there in America, we shall have done everybody a service. If it stops all those posters on every hoarding, most of them telling a pack of lies, and the expenditure of £250,000 in the national newspapers in a general election campaign, we shall have performed a valuable service.

I do not say that that will make politics 100 per cent. honest, but it will go down that track. It represents a big advance. When we get the recommendations on the statute book before the end of this Parliament in order to enact them for the next Parliament, that will be a useful step forward.

9.11 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I shall be brief. It is with some reserve that I speak, with the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) having returned to his seat. Last Thursday, he accused me of not having read the report that was the subject matter of our debate, when in fact I had read it, although I admit that I did not give much evidence of having done so. I must declare that I have not read today's report in its entirety. I have, however, read chapter 12, and I shall confine my remarks to that.

I took great exception to the comments of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) on political donations, but I shall not stray into that ground, as I have not read the report. However, I have dipped into the telephone directory of evidence and read many of the submissions. I draw the attention of the House especially to the evidence given by Peter Riddell of *The Times*, which I found lucid and extremely educated. I speak in an entirely unpartisan manner, as Mr. Riddell has been particularly uncomplimentary about me.

Chapter 12 deals with referendums. The issue is not just that we are having so many referendums—I believe that 13 were promised in the Labour party manifesto, although I freely admit that I have not read that document—but the importance of the questions before us in referendums. Those are questions central to our constitution and are almost impossible to unpick. Once passed, the policies that are put in place—the changes to the constitution—are almost irreversible. It is almost a case of one man, one vote, once. There is something totalitarian about the very suggestion of the settled will of the people. The phrase sends a shudder down my spine.

Nevertheless, the issue of referendums is a hugely important question, and it is therefore proper that the Neill committee has dealt with it—and, I think, well. An important principle of democracy is at stake. We know that the central principle of democracy is that the will of the majority should prevail. However, I think that there is an even more important principle that underpins that, and that is that the minority—the losers—must accept that the will of the majority has been legitimately arrived at. I certainly think that that will not be the case unless we are prepared to examine and implement the recommendations of the committee on referendums.

There was always that lingering resentment referred to by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) about the 1975 referendum. I understood that the expenditure was 20:1 in terms of the money that was spent by each side. Nevertheless, the question of finance is particularly important. The evidence given to the committee in that respect was quite instructive, and was referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) in the context of the Welsh experience and the funding of the Welsh no campaign.

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

Recommendation 84 on core funding is important. There is a widely held perception that there must be a fair opportunity for each side to put its case to the voters. It is not sufficient to say—the Labour party's evidence to the committee appeared to suggest this—that, if protagonists are not able to co-ordinate a campaign and raise funds to finance it, it is evident that they have little political support. The basis of a referendum is that it must reach out beyond the organised political parties to those who are not and never have been politically organised.

I think that one example will suffice. Let us suppose that we had had a referendum on the Maastricht treaty. The three main political parties would have lined up to back the treaty; they would have organised and run such a campaign. However, those who opposed the treaty—I submit that they comprised a large proportion of the electorate—would have found themselves without a ready-made organisation to make the case. It is important that core funding, as proposed by the committee, should be in place and available to assist in those circumstances. Therefore, I believe that recommendation 84 is sound.

Placing national limits on referendum campaigns is, I think, much more problematical. In 1975, the two campaigns were required to publish their accounts, in the hope that that would provide some restraint on their expenditure. I think that that was a pious hope. However, I am not sure that there is much else that can be done without unnecessarily restricting free speech.

It is unnecessary and undesirable to require opponents to operate under one political umbrella, even if they support the same side on a political question. There are quite different ideological routes that might lead to the same case. That is obviously clear with the campaign that would emerge against the single European currency. It comprises a host of very different groups reflecting different ideological backgrounds. I believe that it would be a restraint on free speech to impose any sort of financial limit on those groups collectively.

As for the role of Government, I entirely support recommendation 89. I differ from the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) in this respect. I believe that it is proper for Ministers actively to campaign in a referendum campaign without using the Government machine to support that case.

9.18 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): When the Home Secretary opened this interesting debate, I chastised him for beginning inauspiciously on a partisan note, which is not how he conducted himself in last Thursday's debate. I am afraid to say that he set the tone for some of his hon. Friends who followed him. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) has left the Chamber, because I intended to address a few remarks to her. I hope that she will reappear.

The background to the debate is the Labour party's contention that the report has been brought before Parliament entirely because of shortcomings and a lack of standards in the Conservative party. That was evident in the remarks of the Home Secretary and those of the hon. Members for Cleethorpes and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I thought it was only a matter of time before the hon. Gentleman became an establishment figure. Now that we know he is the author of this report, his hour has arrived. I do not know what it will do for his 74 per cent. vote in Bolsover now that his constituents are aware that he is part of the establishment in the House.

In various interventions, I have said that the criticism that has been levelled at the Conservative party is unjust. There is no doubt that, in the run-up to the last election, the Labour party sought to profit from the allegation that the Conservative party's standards had fallen below par.

The idea that the Labour Government have, since the election, behaved in a pristine fashion is contradicted by the facts. The Foreign Secretary sought to install his mistress, at public expense, in an office in—*[Interruption.]* As the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) may have been intimating, that was a disgrace. The Paymaster General has been upbraided by the Standards and Privileges Committee. A Labour Member has lost the Whip because he has brought the party into disrepute. Another Labour Member faces election charges, and we have seen squalid activity by the Labour party in local government. Labour Members do not like to be reminded of that, because they have tried to pretend that they have come into government to clean up an unclean act.

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes has not returned. I do not want to be discourteous to her, but I must say that her contribution to the debate was particularly mean. I expressed concern when, as a new Member with no experience of the House, she was appointed to the Standards and Privileges Committee. I thought that it was unfortunate that someone with no qualifications and no knowledge of the House was appointed to that Committee.

It is my personal crusade to correct the huge injustice that was done to a former hon. Member, my friend Mr. Neil Hamilton. It is extremely unfortunate that this matter has been allowed to lie on the table, as it is now perfectly clear that members of the Committee, including Sir Gordon Downey, chose to rely on the word of a liar, Mr. Fayed, and on his employees.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I advise the hon. Member that this is a dubious line for him to take in this debate. He should return to the substance of the debate.

Mr. Howarth: I am dealing with a dubious character. The hon. Lady dealt with party political funding and referred to the funding of Members of Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), using historical precedent, also mentioned that matter.

The Labour party sought to build a case against the Conservative party for falling below standards. Mr. Fayed has been proved to be a man of ill repute, whose word cannot be trusted. Therefore, the Committee should revisit the matter in the light of what he did in relation to Tiny Rowland's safe deposit box, which was under his command.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): What has that got to do with the debate?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman, who I believe has a non-speaking role in the House, asks from a sedentary position what that has to do with the debate. I am responding in particular to the remarks of the hon.

Member for Cleethorpes, to which I listened throughout. It is only fair to point that out, because a lot of Labour Members have cast aspersions on the Conservative party and our source of funding, using that as a reason for bringing these changes and the Neill committee's deliberations before the House. It is therefore entirely right to put the record straight, in so far as I am able, with my persuasion that I do not believe that my party deserves the reputation that people have sought to place around its neck.

The Labour party is fired up about this matter, but all the money that we spent at the previous general election could not bring us a result anywhere near that which we might have hoped to achieve. I do not believe, therefore, that Labour Members' concerns about party political funding should weigh so heavily on their minds, given that it is perfectly clear that money spent—however much—is not proportional to votes received.

We need not consider only the Conservative party. Sir James Goldsmith, of the Referendum party, spent about £20 million, which was not much less than the Labour party or the Conservative party spent. He did not get a single Member elected to the House, so that proves that cash does not buy seats. The Labour party should therefore start piping down on that issue.

We must be clear about what is being proposed in the committee's report. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) has accepted much of it on behalf of the Conservative party, and it has been welcomed in other quarters, but we must be clear that it will create a substantial bureaucracy. An electoral commission is to be established, new criminal offences are to be introduced, there is to be a huge bureaucracy of quarterly reporting for political parties and a lot of imposition on local party organisations. I am not sure that local parties will be able to produce the bureaucracy that is envisaged, and will be required, by the report.

I must deal with two specific points. *[Interruption.]* I shall not be too long. I welcome the committee ruling out state funding, which would be an entirely wrong use of taxpayers' money. I believe that I have the support of the hon. Member for Bolsover on that. If he wrote that paragraph, as he suggested, that is two issues on which he and I are ad idem. I am at one with him on the euro debate, which is why I am wearing a sterling badge, and I look forward to joining him in that battle.

I welcome what the report says. I do not believe that the country is ready to delve deep into its pocket to finance political activity. If we rule that out, we must accept the consequences, which are that we must receive money from private sources and we must have a mechanism by which that will be acceptable to the public.

Now that the Home Secretary is back with us, I hope that he will not mind if I quote from his response to my question at the Home Affairs Committee recently, to which right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) alluded. The Home Secretary said:

"What we are talking about here is paying for our democracy, paying to ensure that there are informed choices made available and also paying for the machinery of our political parties. One of the things I resent"—

as I do—

"is this insinuation that there is something slightly dirty about the running of political parties or the involvement of people in political parties, when this is very honourable, and without all the people who run our political parties, most of whom are volunteers who do their work for nothing, we would not have a functioning democracy in this country. We ought to celebrate that and not somehow be ashamed of it. I also agree with you that overwhelmingly people as individuals should pay for the running of political parties and it should not come from the state because if it comes from the state then we are down the slippery slope of detached political elites and also corruption."

The Home Secretary got it absolutely right; I agree with every word. There is, however, a consequence of such a view. I fear that, in the way in which the Neill committee is seeking to ensure that individual giving is sanitised, we shall come adrift from the idea of encouraging people to give freely.

Although I welcome the proposed tax relief, disclosure will unquestionably have an adverse effect on the Conservative party. I know people who would like to give to the Conservative party not because they want an honour or to buy a policy, but because they want to support a party that stands for principles with which they agree, as they might support a charity. They will be deterred from doing so if they fear that they will be penalised by the Government of the day for supporting the Conservative party. The Government must seriously consider that before they go down the road of prescription and openness. If the result is that people are deterred from giving to political parties, the policy that the Home Secretary enunciated, with which I strongly agree, will be worth absolutely nothing.

It is extremely important that the committee's recommendations on referendums are accepted entirely. The Government have a duty to consider the matter carefully and not kick it into the long grass. They have such a duty because they have elected to take the referendum as a new and frequently used political and constitutional device. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) made clear what could happen if the Government and the Opposition of the day were united, leaving the anti vote without any core funding.

9.31 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): This has been an important debate on an issue of profound significance, not just to the health of political parties, but to the future direction of politics in this country. I sense personally that we are at an important crossroads. The Neill report signposts a clear route to the restoration of trust and confidence in the democratic process. We have travelled the alternative route for far too long, indulging in incrimination, allegations of abuse and corruption, often with the scantiest evidence or justification.

It was deeply sad that the Home Secretary, for whom, as he knows, I have the highest regard, took such an alternative route for much of his speech in opening this debate. It is surely time for us to move on. Labour in government must face up to its shortcomings and recognise the futility of pursuing a war of words over allegations of malpractice, which serve only to undermine public confidence in the House and in the very fabric of our democratic process.

I shall resist dwelling on the fact that such criticisms of political parties as there are in the report are, in the main, directed at the Labour party. We have yet to be told who contributed to the Prime Minister's blind trust when he was Leader of the Opposition. The Ecclestone affair was

[Mr. John Greenway]

a new departure because it left a clear impression that policy was influenced. Several major contributors to Labour at the election now have peerages. I know some of them personally. They are undoubtedly capable and sincere, and may well deserve their seats in the other place. I simply make the point that people who live in glasshouses should not throw stones. It does none of us any good when we do.

The committee has made a powerful and invaluable contribution to the efforts of both Government and Parliament to restore public confidence in the political process. Its early reports have been characterised by a willingness to set aside party differences and by a readiness that the recommendations be accepted without equivocation. The same should happen now, with a determination to grasp the opportunity to establish more transparent and enduring structures for the conduct of public life in which the public can have confidence.

The Labour party long argued for the committee to examine all the issues surrounding the funding of political parties. Indeed, as Lord Neill reminds us, it was the Prime Minister who gave the committee the extended terms of reference to undertake this study. Many members of the public believe that Government policy is influenced by large donations. A lack of transparency about the sources of party funding fosters this suspicion. These deep-seated concerns and damaging perceptions will not be addressed and laid to rest if Parliament and the Government fail to take heed of the Neill committee's findings, or if key recommendations are ignored or watered down in a crude and cynical attempt to gain party advantage.

We cannot be seen merely to be paying lip service to the new structures and ideas that Lord Neill has recommended. I believe that the public want to see all political parties and the Government embracing the Neill proposals, not just without demur, but with open enthusiasm—speedily, comprehensively and in earnest. There should be no question of the Government cherry-picking the bits that they like and walking away from the bits that do not suit their purposes. Labour wanted this review. It would be utterly shameful to refuse to adopt the principle behind any of the key recommendations.

It is clear from the debate that the Government do not like and are less than enthusiastic about at least three important respects. First, I wish to refer to the Short money. There has been much discussion about this in the debate but, as someone new to Front-Bench responsibilities, I know that we are inadequately resourced, and we should accept what Lord Neill has to say. I note also that several Labour Members wanted to take matters further, with funding for the Government party to oppose the Government whenever necessary.

I wish to mention tax relief. If we are to have openness of funding, it is crucial that—as the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said—we encourage mass membership. The tax relief proposals will go a long way towards encouraging that. It is both sad and disappointing that the Treasury—whose hand was on the shoulder of the Home Secretary—thinks that this proposal is too expensive.

Most disappointing of all is the Government's attitude to the recommendations on the conduct of referendums. Clearly this is something that the Government did not bargain for, yet they have been most enthusiastic about the promotion of the referendum as an important means of gauging public opinion on significant areas of public policy. Several hon. Members have said that, as Labour has encouraged this development—and intends to resort to it on future occasions—there is every reason to establish some basic ground rules. The Government cannot complain if, as a result of their own inadequacy in this regard, the Neill committee has taken this long-overdue opportunity to do the job for them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor)—we pay tribute to him and to the other members of the committee—said that the matter was a key issue on which the committee had to make recommendations. The conduct of recent referendums has lacked consistency. As Dr. James Mitchell of the university of Strathclyde commented:

"The rules of the game have differed in each referendum."

The report highlights two main concerns—the role of the Government and the funding of campaigns. However, the Government's failure to ensure that both sides of the argument are presented to the electorate—their failure to put the case both for and against a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly and a mayor for London—deserves the greatest condemnation, as it has undermined the democratic legitimacy of the referendums' outcomes.

Indeed, Lord Neill's detailed review of the referendum on the new Welsh Assembly is a damning indictment of the way in which the referendum was conducted and the lack of fairness in the campaign. As he says in paragraph 32 of chapter 12, a fairer campaign may well have resulted in a different outcome. He also said that the referendum on the proposals for a mayor for London was only marginally better. Surely no one can be comfortable with such an incriminating and conclusive judgment.

That need not happen again. The Neill committee offers the House and the country a sensible and practical framework for the conduct of future referendums. On funding, it rightly concludes that equality cannot be guaranteed, as spending is not confined to political parties or to members of those organisations that may traditionally have campaigned openly for one party during general elections. As the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said, no matter how much money one spends, one will not win if one has not got the argument. I also entirely agreed with what he said about proportional representation.

The 1975 European referendum showed that a balance could be struck in the set amount of money that each campaign received. That arrangement was sensible and, as Lord Neill recommends, we should use it as the benchmark for the future. The objective should be to guarantee that both sides of the argument are clearly stated—literature should be provided to every home to that effect.

The set funding formula will not guarantee equality, so it is ever more essential that any inequality should not be exacerbated by, as Lord Neill says, the use of taxpayers' money to support the Government's point of view. I welcome the Home Secretary's acknowledgement of the general agreement that the civil service machine of Government should remain neutral and I agree with those who suggest that the European Commission should keep out of any future referendum—if there is one—on the euro.

It would be foolish and short-sighted to ignore the importance of a proper framework for referendum campaigns. A referendum should be able to settle an argument once and for all, but it will not be able to do so if it is perceived as an unfair contest. If, as seems likely, a referendum is being used to seek a popular mandate for major constitutional change, it is surely vital to the enduring outcome of the answer to the question put that both sides of the argument are adequately stated and understood. How many times have we heard it said that the country was misled in 1975? There is no room for Government-inspired misleading propaganda. As Lord Neill's recommendations are clearly intended to last, Ministers should have a little humility and bear in mind the fact that, one day, the roles will be reversed.

Mr. Straw: They have been reversed.

Mr. Greenway: They will be reversed again, and sooner than the right hon. Gentleman thinks.

Labour's lack of commitment to the recommendations in that key area is contemptible. We have been treated today, not to a ringing endorsement, but to fudge and equivocation. The Government have been caught on the hop with a problem that they had not bargained for. Instead of facing up to the committee's principled proposals for the conduct of future referendums, the Government have chosen to prevaricate. That is a great pity, because in every respect the report heralds a fresh start in the affairs of major political parties and the conduct of election and referendum campaigns.

The Government have hinted that the legislation to implement Neill may not be introduced in the next Session—I suppose that that means that it will not—and that is disappointing given the urgency of some of the issues. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) rightly said, we should voluntarily bind ourselves to Neill's recommendations. The Minister has the chance to tell us that that is what the Government intend to do.

The report concludes:

"Our recommendations form an overall integrated scheme for the reform of the funding of political parties."

It has gifted us the opportunity of a clean break, allowing us to put the past behind us and draw a line under what has gone before, often under the cloak of confidentiality. We should embrace the findings whole-heartedly.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): Despite the occasional heat that it has generated, this debate, on the whole, has been worth while. It was important to reflect the care that the Neill committee took in reaching its conclusions: much thought clearly went into the recommendations, so it was necessary for us to give the whole range of issues an airing in the House.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) tended to take a rather sneering tone. I say that more in—

Sir Norman Fowler: Sorrow than in anger?

Mr. Howarth: I want to use that phrase later, in another context, so I will save it.

I say that in the hope that, in due course, those Conservative Members will come to see that there is more that unites than divides us. I do not want to be too partisan, as I want to build a bit of consensus; but, if they are honest, they will accept that, if they were in government now, there would have been no Neill committee, no proposals, no commitment to a draft Bill and none of the debate that we have just had, because none of the issues would have been on the agenda. That is the truth of the matter. It is not entirely plausible at this juncture in the political cycle for Conservative spokesmen to take the moral high ground.

I hope that we can all agree that our starting point must be that all hon. Members and all political parties should be open and transparent about the way in which our parties and our politics are funded. As part of our commitment to strengthening democracy, I can confirm that we take the matter extremely seriously.

Again, I hope that we can all agree on the important principle that giving money to a political party, whether in small subscriptions or in large donations, is not in itself a disreputable activity. In any democracy, funding political activity is an important and necessary way of stimulating political organisation and debate. Indeed, the report says as much, but it equally makes it clear that secrecy about the source of donations will inevitably lead to suspicions about donors' motives.

The most important question that the public will want to ask if donors keep donations secret is, what have they got to hide? In the absence of any answer, the inevitable conclusion will be that such transactions involve cash for favours or other disreputable activities. That will always be the public perception of such secret donations. Often, suspicions will be without foundation, but unless everything is out in the open, the worst will be assumed. The only way to deal with that is to lift the veil of secrecy. The Neill report will help us to base the system of party funding firmly on the principles of integrity, accountability and openness.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made clear, we welcome and strongly support the broad thrust of the report. Our manifesto—influenced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—said that we strongly believed that donations of £5,000 and more should be disclosed and that foreign donations should be banned. I shall not repeat all that has been said about the Conservative party and Asil Nadir, but any party that indulges in that kind of funding will always be open to criticism.

For the system to be watertight, robust and clear reporting arrangements will be needed. We welcome the recommendations for limits on campaign spending and the establishment of an election commission to police the system of disclosure and reporting.

The report contains back-up proposals on how to set up and implement the arrangements. However, it is important that the political parties have a voice to ensure that the machinery is realistic and manageable, as well as robust and comprehensive. We have agreed to authorise Home Office officials to set up dialogue with the political parties

[Mr. Howarth]

represented in the House and a small number of others. To begin the process, officials will shortly be writing to each political party, inviting them to nominate one person to act as a conduit. I hope that all the parties will respond positively. We recognise that it is necessary to have the mechanics in place to enable everyone to feel happy with the eventual arrangements. Every party should be able to respond. Provided they are not trying to create loopholes or get round the Neill recommendations, their points will be taken seriously.

Several Conservative Members, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, mentioned the euro. The current Government information campaign has only one purpose: to prepare business for the euro, which will come into operation from 1 January 1999. It has nothing to do with the possible entry of the UK. If anyone has any doubts about that, they should read the literature that is circulating. The Treasury has produced fact sheets for businesses, particularly aimed at those that trade with countries that we already know will adopt the euro. It would be irresponsible not to give such facts and advice. If businesses were not prepared, particularly those that trade with the countries involved, it would be to their disadvantage and to the disadvantage of the British economy. The campaign is perfectly responsible. It has nothing to do with the referendum.

I accept that the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) has read chapter 12 of the report. He demonstrated a detailed knowledge of it and, on this occasion, failed to move me to say anything critical of him, although I do not necessarily agree with every word—or even many of the words—that he said.

I must say, more in sorrow than in anger, that the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) made an unworthy speech which lowered the tone of the debate.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am sorry that the Minister felt that my speech lowered the tone. He has not been in the Chamber for all of the debate, but he has heard his hon. Friends and the Home Secretary chastise the Conservative party as though it had fallen below par. I do not believe that my party has done so, and I sought to give examples of where the Labour party has fallen below par.

Mr. George Howarth: The hon. Gentleman should remember a remark that I made a few moments ago. If it had not been for the behaviour of the previous Government, and of his party, the Neill committee need never have happened. Without his party's behaviour, there would have been no proposals and nothing for us to debate tonight. I do not want to be entirely at odds with the hon. Gentleman; I recognise that he has a strong personal friendship with Neil Hamilton, and that that has motivated him to some extent. However, that friendship cannot justify some of his remarks.

Several Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), suggested that some expenditure on some of the referendums that we have held had been unfair. I reject that. The Scottish and the Welsh people would reject it too. The Opposition must answer questions themselves. In a written question in October 1992, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) asked

"the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total expenditure so far by his Department on publicising the poll tax and related information."

My hon. Friend was told:

"The costs to date are £5,710,500."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 1992; Vol. 212, c. *350.*]

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No; I do not have much time.

If the previous Government could waste all that money on a tax that no one wanted, and that eventually had to be withdrawn, we will take no lessons from the Opposition on how to promote referendums.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said, we want to study the proposals on tax relief, which have a measure of support among the Opposition and the Liberal Democrats. If we are to give tax relief, the Opposition must recognise that it cannot come from nowhere. Revenues that the Government would have had for, say, education or health would be forgone. We have to weigh that loss in the balance when we make a decision on the tax relief proposals.

Shona McIsaac: I am intrigued by what my hon. Friend says about tax relief. In the Neill committee's report, Lord Parkinson is cited as saying that the Tory party technically does not exist. Can we give tax relief to something that does not exist?

Mr. Howarth: The electorate almost made that a fact at the general election. I welcome the fact that there is a considerable difference between the Conservative party memorandum published in the report and the extent to which the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has welcomed the report's proposals. The right hon. Gentleman was gracious enough to say that the report did not reflect exactly what his party wanted, but that the proposals were sufficiently balanced for him to feel inclined to accept them in the round. That is a good way to deal with it.

The Government welcome the report. It reflects a commitment that we made in our manifesto to require full disclosure of donations above £5,000 and to ban foreign funding. Following this debate, we will move forward by preparing a draft Bill for publication next summer and by legislating before the next general election. The Committee on Standards in Public Life has performed a valuable service—that is my view and I hope that the House shares it—not only for politics but for the country. I hope that that will in some way restore the public's confidence in politics. If we are to clean up the politics of Britain—and the public demand nothing less—whatever our politics we need to give the proposals the proper weight, seriousness and priority that they deserve. We will do so.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Statute Law Repeals Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

STATUTE LAW REPEALS BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Consolidation Bills),

That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

Question agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Education

That the Education (Infant Class Sizes)(England) Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 1973), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

Social Security

That the Social Security (Contributions) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 2211) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Social Security (Welfare to Work) Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 2231) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

Disabled Persons

That the Disabled Persons (Disability Discrimination) (Exemption for Small Employers) Order 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 2618), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the eight motions relating to Committees.

Ordered,

Catering Committee

That Mr. Thomas Graham be discharged from the Catering Committee and Rosemary McKenna be added to the Committee.

Education and Employment Committee

That Ms Margaret Hodge and Mr. Gerry Steinberg be discharged from the Education and Employment Committee and Mr. Gordon Marsden and Mr. Malcolm Wicks be added to the Committee.

Home Affairs Committee

That Mr. Ross Cranston and Ms Beverley Hughes be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Miss Melanie Johnson and Mr. Paul Stinchcombe be added to the Committee.

Information Committee

That Mr. John Whittingdale be discharged from the Information Committee and Mr. Tim Collins be added to the Committee.

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

That Mr. Desmond Browne be discharged from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Mr. Stephen McCabe be added to the Committee.

Social Security Committee

That Mr. Paul Goggins, Ms Patricia Hewitt, Mr. Frank Roy, Ms Gisela Stuart and Mr. Malcolm Wicks be discharged from the Social Security Committee and Mr. Vernon Coaker, Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mr. Michael Foster (Hastings and Rye), Mrs. Joan Humble and Kali Mountford be added to the Committee.

Trade and Industry Committee

That Gillian Merron be discharged from the Trade and Industry Committee and Helen Southworth be added to the Committee.

Treasury Committee

That Mr. Charles Clarke and Ms Ruth Kelly be discharged from the Treasury Committee and Dr. Lewis Moonie and Jacqui Smith be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Information Technology (Rural Schools)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): For me, 1 May 1997 was an important day. It marked the completion of three decades in the world of computing. In that last proper job before becoming a Member of Parliament, I worked in software development and computer management in local government, so I have a professional interest in the subject of this debate. As important as that interest is the fact that the seat I represent has a substantial number of village primary schools, all but one of which I have visited in recent months as part of that fact-finding activity that is pursued by virtually all newly elected Members.

I am writing a report to be presented to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, which summarises the reaction of the 51 schools in my constituency to the impact of Labour's education policies and priorities in the first 18 months of our Government. Much of the comment was positive, but there are a number of real difficulties, such as teacher morale, resources and the rate of expected change faced by schools—issues that I hope to raise in future debates. However, the subject of this debate cropped up so frequently in my discussions with heads, teachers, governors, parents and students, that it needed an immediate airing, especially in the light of last Friday's announcement by the Prime Minister of the information technology package for schools, worth approximately £1 billion.

That announcement will be most welcome in all schools—urban and rural, secondary and primary—because all schools are experiencing financial, timetabling and resource pressures in delivering the IT curriculum. I hope that this short debate will show why small rural primary schools need special attention and support.

The village school that I attended with my sisters, following two generations of our family and followed by my four daughters, is a few yards from my front gate. For many years, I was active as a governor of the school, and saw at first hand how small schools were often left to implement the grand designs of the previous Government with too few resources, no preparation time and little training, without appreciation but with lots of exhortation, and not infrequent criticism and condemnation.

The teaching profession in 1992 and 1997 asked general election candidates for a period of stability. They were not saying, "Stop the world, we want to get off," but urging Government to introduce only properly resourced, adequately piloted change, when schools had been consulted and staff trained. Schools were often ranked but never thanked; frequently named and shamed, but rarely sustained and supported. The targets set were constantly moved. Like many pioneers, they were hit by the arrows. I hope—no, I am confident—that things can only get better.

We must establish a real partnership of equals, among Government, local education authorities and schools in driving forward our top political priority. The massive extra sums made available for schools over the life of this Government must be used effectively, as there are risks in investing in information technology, as I hope to show.

IT is rapidly transforming the way we work, use our leisure, and, crucially, how we learn. In our small village schools, often with fewer than half a dozen teachers, there can be difficulties in implementing IT coherently and satisfactorily. It is no use having a gift-wrapped, Pentium multi-media machine delivered, when the responsible member of staff is already delivering the new literacy strategy, planning the numeracy initiative, getting ready for key stage 2 standard assessment tests, marking a set of science projects, and fund raising for musical instruments. In smaller schools in particular, staff must wear several hats. Cramming yet another on to an overstretched head without proper preparation courts disaster.

Training must be structured continuing, and must take account of the difficulties in releasing teachers and other staff from smaller schools. A series of half-day courses, on-line tutorials or pre-dawn Open university programmes will not be adequate; it must be done properly. Teachers with little or no IT background need consistent, continuous professional development. Most teachers entered the profession before the personal computer as we know it burst on to the scene in the mid-1980s. The number is proportionately bigger in small schools.

Even now, the IT content of teacher training courses is limited, with little follow-up. It is unsurprising that the IT skills acquired can quickly become outdated. Although there has been some generic training in the schools on-line project, there is still a substantial lack of confidence and competence. For the smaller school, it is not possible within timetabling and staffing constraints to carve out sufficient free time for staff to develop their expertise, for instance, in using the internet as a teaching resource. The urgent crowds out the important. Whatever their attitude to IT, wherever they are on the spectrum, from perplexed anxiety to zealous enthusiasm, teachers are trying to acquire new skills without budget or non-contact time.

Serving teachers are sometimes put under pressure to train their colleagues. While sitting next to the newly qualified teacher can be useful, too often it means doing it on the cheap and exploiting the good will of staff who happen to be IT-literate, confident software users or unafraid of tackling hardware difficulties. These technological paragons are rarer in village staff rooms than Chris Woodhead fans.

My preferred training alternative is external providers. I strongly endorse the view of the National Union of Teachers that such training providers must demonstrate the application of IT and not make it an isolated subject area. Problem-solving approaches to teaching must be given priority. Conventional training, whether live or computer-based, can be highly wasteful. It is often better to deliver the operating detail as it is required. There is an analogy. Most can cook a tasty dish with a recipe book. Repetition commits the skill to memory, and fresh dishes can be brought out quickly.

Special arrangements are needed to provide a cost-effective support service, readily available on site or on line to families of small schools. Until small schools have guaranteed access to that high-quality technical support, it would be ludicrous for them to have to meet nationally imposed IT targets.

Perhaps the best way to provide that service in rural areas is via local education advisory services with a role similar to that of the laboratory technician in secondary

and larger schools. Primary schools welcome the £500 per teacher allocated for IT training under the new opportunities lottery fund, but is it not too much of a gamble to allow that crucial investment to be financed by an electronic raffle? The nation's children deserve better.

In my visits to north–west Leicestershire schools, I am often impressed by the leading-edge hardware I see, but the finance tends to depend on the generosity, energy or affluence of parent fund raisers. In some areas, keeping schools' computers up to date and compatible with one another is extremely difficult. With tighter budgets come more constraints and greater risks; thus, purchasing policy tends to be ultra-cautious, and old equipment is not unknown, with all its associated costs and problems. I was not at all surprised by a recent national survey that rated half of all school hardware obsolete.

In smaller schools, lack of available space is not an issue restricted to disk drives: rotas are necessary in cramped classrooms to control access. That is a major disadvantage for those students who have no home access to a PC, let alone the internet. My straw poll showed that such students comprised up to two thirds of all pupils in North-West Leicestershire. Inequality of PC and network access is certainly a rural issue.

It is said that a sizeable minority of smaller schools throughout the country have no budget, training or staff development policy for IT. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that that will eventually make it impossible for those schools to deliver our ambitious national curriculum in IT? I hope that he will give an outline of the Government's thinking on the most appropriate application of information technology in primary schools; for, without a coherent strategy, the finest training, fastest hardware and fanciest software in the world will fail—and expensively so.

The Daily Telegraph is not yet required reading by Millbank. Nevertheless, I read a thought-provoking—even depressing—article in that newspaper on 21 October. Leicester university had surveyed a major pilot project in leading-edge IT usage in a large group of Bristol schools. The team's findings included:

"much of what the children were doing was unchallenging and routine. Many (for example) were quite happy to give the appearance of being engaged in useful activity whilst writing 'Manchester United' in different fonts."

It is not only university academics who harbour great unease about the way in which IT is applied in our schools. Let me quote the words of a teacher at a local primary school that was—unfairly, I feel—criticised by the Ofsted inspection team for its work in IT:

"The major issue raised (lack of time in the classroom) cannot be effectively addressed. No matter how expert the staff, how up-to-date the equipment, it is not possible to give the children continual instruction and practice in computer skills within the (crowded) primary curriculum."

Another comment by a local teacher was:

"Children of primary age can only develop processing and retrieval techniques if they practise regularly—but we don't have the equipment at school and they don't have it at home. At the moment the millions of pounds pumped into inadequate, out-dated equipment is delivering very limited opportunities to primary pupils."

Finally, the words of a teacher experienced in IT:

"I just cannot teach a class of 30 children the national curriculum requirements in IT with one computer. We're so frustrated, we're on the point of giving up."

Those are not the comments of fin-de-siecle Luddites, but of hard-working, committed teachers in successful village primary schools. They are overwhelmed with initiatives, anxious to come up to expectations, but fearful that they will invest heavily of their time and energy in IT only to find the curriculum changed, the software dated, and the hardware switched on but the children switched off. Please will the Minister respond to their collective cri de coeur with some urgently needed reassurance?

The pressures of primary school life lead to isolated use of computers in classrooms. Pupils' experience of IT may be unrelated to what is being taught at the time in other curricular areas. A lack of space can mean that the chance for one-to-one intervention by staff makes the effective application of IT for cross-curricular learning impossible for many primary schools and most small rural ones.

The prime use of computers in the early years is always to support and reinforce the learning process. If IT is solely an extra set of skills to be learned, many teachers believe that we are missing the point, and I agree. Too many potato chips on the school dinner menu is unhealthy; ill-considered use of silicon chips in the classroom is not good for children, either. Like its TV cousin, the PC monitor can damage fitness for the world outside.

The writer of the article in *The Daily Telegraph* concluded:

"if the Government thinks that pouring hundreds of millions of pounds into wiring up schools to the 'information super highway' is going to drive up education standards, it is sadly mistaken."

I do not share that pessimistic outlook. Indeed, I am convinced that the single most important use of IT is to transform education, and improve the lot of those who work within it.

The potential of the national grid for learning to benefit all aspects of life in rural primary schools is vast, but we need to do, more—much more—to carry the teaching profession with us, particularly in village schools, as our society grapples with the implications of the information revolution, and our economy demands people who are familiar with its tools of change. This is not just about money; the Government still have a major task on their hands to persuade the world of primary education that appropriate training, continued technical support and adequate curricular space are part of our IT strategy, and that we and they can deliver the goods.

I am certain that the Minister will be able to solve that problem, and I look forward to hearing his solution.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on securing the debate, and on the way in which he argued the case for his constituents.

It will be common ground in the House that the potential of information technology in improving communication between rural and isolated primary schools has been recognised worldwide. That is one reason why Scandinavian countries are investing heavily in IT, and Australia and Canada have been in the forefront of the development of IT in education, including the installation of the necessary infrastructure.

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

The UK leads other G7 countries in the number of computers in schools. There are 18 pupils to a computer in primary schools, nine pupils to a computer in secondary schools, and only four pupils to a computer in special schools. Those raw statistics do not evade my hon. Friend's key point—that we shall be able to transform our performance on IT in schools only if teachers in rural primary schools and others feel that the technology is theirs to control, use and benefit from to the extent that they can stretch and develop their children.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Minister agree that we cannot depend on teachers volunteering to take training and become competent, and that we should aim to provide training for every teacher in every school?

Mr. Clarke: I shall come to that point in a moment when I deal with teacher training, but my short answer is that, although the hon. Gentleman makes an important point, I only partially agree with him.

We shall make progress only if teachers feel that the technology is for them. That brings me to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Leicestershire. In using IT, not only in a separate part of the curriculum but in teaching English, maths and other parts of the curriculum, it is exceptionally important that teachers feel confident and able to use the technology well.

My hon. Friend's point about appropriate technology is entirely correct, and the Manchester United logos that he described are an example of a serious problem. That is why we are focusing our teacher training initiative on ensuring not only that teachers feel confident in using the basic hardware but that they are applying information technology to particular educational needs, at every key stage and in every subject. There is a great danger, which my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, that we shall have hardware lying around the classroom with no one using it, and money being wasted. I believe that we must contest that problem by ensuring that teachers understand, and are aware of, the technology that is at their disposal, and are able to use it well.

That is why we have established a £235 million teacher training programme in IT. That substantial amount of money is needed precisely because of the demoralisation that my hon. Friend described, and because there are very low levels of teacher IT capacity and ability in many schools. I take this opportunity to state that I do not believe that that is because of any Luddism or backward-looking approaches on the part of teachers. The overwhelming majority of teachers want to use IT, and believe that children will benefit from it, but have not been given the training and the opportunity in the classroom to develop their ability and move it forward.

I turn now to the point raised by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs). I believe that the levels of competence and capacity in many of the country's schools—it is probably less of a problem in Northern Ireland, which is leading the way in this area, as in many others—are still very low. The last thing that teachers need at this stage is to be told, "You will do this or that." Teachers must be encouraged to believe that, by acquiring the relevant skills and qualifications, they will be able to do their jobs better. My knowledge of the teaching profession leads me to believe—quite profoundly—that the overwhelming majority of teachers want to benefit from training, and will take the opportunity to do so on a voluntary basis.

I acknowledge that, in two or three years, I might return to the House and say something slightly different. For instance, if we were achieving 95 per cent. levels of competence, and 5 per cent. of teachers said that they did not want training, rather than 5 per cent. or 10 per cent. levels of competence and 80 per cent. of teachers wanting to do better, my answer might be slightly different. However, in the context of the present situation in England and Wales, the level of competence and skill on the one hand and enthusiasm on the other leads me to believe that the voluntary method is the best way to proceed.

That is why we have established a substantial teacher training programme. It aims to raise teachers who have a low or zero level of competence to a level of some competence, and, critically, also aims to ensure that people can apply their educational expertise and move it forward in particular disciplines. We have commissioned a tendering process that the Teacher Training Agency is carrying through, and tenders close on 20 November this year. We shall see what bids come in from people seeking to provide teacher training of the kind that we have described.

We have already received substantial and good bids from consortiums of local education authorities, colleges and so on. We have also received some talented and good bids from IT companies and educational organisations, often working together in order to overcome the problem—to which my hon. Friend referred—of teachers receiving a bit of training and no more. That would be a waste of money—my hon. Friend's point was very appropriate.

We also take my hon. Friend's point that it is no use training teachers but providing little on-going support. The present LEA adviser system is very patchy: only half of LEAs have a very good IT support system. That system has been run down in the past, and must be rebuilt.

Mr. David Taylor: I accept that. I worked for a local authority that had a very good LEA support system. Is it not possible to invest in all LEAs in order to bring the performance of the patchy ones to the level of the best?

Mr. Clarke: I hope, and believe, that that will be one result of this process. Although some commercial companies provide support to individual schools—for example, through school management systems and administration, which is an important support offered to local schools—there is no doubt that we need a broader, better network. That might be best offered through a more efficient local authority network system.

I also concede my hon. Friend's important point that there are key pedagogic issues regarding how technology is used in the classroom.

When I took on my ministerial responsibilities, I discovered that some of those issues had not been fully addressed, and in my opinion they remain to be fully addressed. I am not sure which is the best form of technology to provide in the classroom. Is it a whiteboard? Is it a better developed overhead projector? Is it a load

of PCs? We have limited resources, and the pedagogic issues, subject by subject, age by age, are different. They need to be thought through carefully, for the reasons that my hon. Friend identified—if they are not, we shall have inadequate results and wasted resources.

In that context, I emphasise that we are conducting a review of the national curriculum for the year 2000, and that the way in which IT can and should be used most effectively in different subject areas is being specifically addressed. I hope that that gives my hon. Friend some reassurance.

I make two concluding points. First, I wish to comment on the Luddite opinions quoted by my hon. Friend—from which he dissociated himself—from articles by John Clare in the *Daily Telegraph*. There is a view that all this money is wasted—that IT can offer nothing, and that it diverts education from the fundamentals in which traditional education has led.

I reject that view, as do the Government. I believe that the teachers to whom my hon. Friend spoke rejected it. They understand that the future lies with the IT society. The older of us may regret that, but it is a fact, and it is the way to go forward. If we leave our children ill equipped to deal with that society, we do them no service. The argument in that *Daily Telegraph* article—that we should leave it all aside—is a fundamentally ill-considered view, which is rejected by the vast majority of people in education in this country.

I was rather shocked to see that, in the response to the Prime Minister's launch of further spending on Friday 6 November, some spokespeople of other parties—lining up with John Clare—simply said that the money was being wasted, and that it would be better spent on books. I think that the Conservative party lined up with the Luddite tendency.

Finally, I turn to the specific subject of the debate—IT provision in rural primary schools. As my hon. Friend coherently argued, IT is especially important to rural primary schools. Small schools need stronger communities, including IT communities, to offer stimulation, and to support what they do. That is why, in the initiatives that we have taken forward, we have given specific priority to rural primary schools.

First, we have said that, in distributing the £105 million of standards fund money for the national grid for learning, local education authorities should take specific account of the additional needs of primary schools, small schools and isolated schools. Money from that fund will be targeted—extra priority will be given to rural primary schools, for the reasons stated.

Mr. David Taylor: How will that targeting take place—through the LEA or by a more direct route?

Mr. Clarke: It is through the LEA, because that item of the standards fund is allocated through local education authorities, but the guidance that we have issued specifically asked them to give particular attention to that need. I urge my hon. Friend to tell his local education authority that it should give specific priority to the schools in his constituency when it allocates that resource.

On teacher training, we have specifically recognised—the second element in the funding—the need to focus on rural schools. Although the funding made available to a school will be based mainly on the number of teachers in the school, we want to recognise the special difficulties of small schools by allocating a specific lump sum of £750 to every school, regardless of size, followed by an amount for each teacher.

For example, if the amount per teacher in England was £500, a three-teacher school would have a total of £2,250, including the lump sum—equivalent to £750 per teacher. A 30-teacher school, with 10 times as many teachers, would have a total of £15,750, equivalent to £525 per teacher, or 70 per cent. of the figure per teacher of the three-teacher school.

Mr. David Taylor: My hon. Friend represents a seat in a county that is largely rural. Leicestershire is less rural, but nevertheless has problems of access. Will he confirm that, in establishing the level of funding, he will pay particular attention to travelling costs and the availability of courses?

Mr. Clarke: We shall give particular attention to the issues that my hon. Friend raises. I emphasise that we are taking account of the specific needs of IT in rural schools. I hope that that discrimination in favour of rural schools will be welcomed.

I conclude by again congratulating my hon. Friend on securing the debate. The subject is important, and I am glad that he has highlighted it.

Madam Speaker: Order. The House ordered last Thursday that I should not adjourn until any message from the Lords relating to the Scotland Bill had been received. As no such message has yet been received, I must now suspend the sitting. Arrangements will be made for the Division bells to ring five minutes before I resume the Chair, in order for me to adjourn the House at that time.

10.29 pm

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 November 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Midwives

1. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement about the grading of qualified midwives. [57349]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The great majority of midwives are graded E to G and will earn salaries up to £22,255 from 1 December 1998.

Mr. Edwards: Will my right hon. Friend join me in applauding the excellent work of midwives, such as those whom I met at Nevill Hall hospital last Friday? Will he work with his Welsh Office colleagues to ensure that midwives working in trusts in Wales receive as a minimum the F grade recommended in England?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, I join my hon. Friend in recognising the invaluable work performed by midwives in the NHS. The Government accepted last year's pay review body recommendations, which urged us to reflect any changes in midwives' roles and responsibilities in the appropriate grade and pay. That message has been communicated directly to all NHS trusts. We expect each and every trust to take that issue seriously but, equally, we expect them to ensure that grading reflects real responsibilities and clinical expertise.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Given that no Minister was willing to come over to Westminster Central hall three weeks ago to face the 1,000 midwives—*[Interruption.]* That is quite true. The midwives were clear that a few of them had a meeting in private at the Department, but Ministers were not willing to meet the rally in Westminster Central hall. Given that there is clearly a huge crisis in staffing and morale not just among midwives, but among nurses and other health workers, how much of the £21 billion announced in July will be used to improve the pay and conditions of midwives, nurses and health workers? It is no good modernising equipment and buildings in the NHS without modernising pay and conditions, and paying any salary increase in one go rather than in stages.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman has made two foolish points. First, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health did meet midwives on the day that they lobbied Parliament and, in addition, my noble Friend Baroness Hayman met the leader of the Royal College of Midwives. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman will know as well as I do that the process for determining pay and conditions for midwives and nurses is governed by an independent pay review body, and its work is now under way. As I understand it, all parties in the House subscribe to that process, as do nurses and midwives. We have submitted our evidence, and the midwives and nursing trade unions have submitted theirs. Our evidence makes it clear that we want to see a fair pay rise for all nurses and midwives which is affordable to the NHS. In particular, we want to see progress on the starting rate of pay for nurses. If we are to do that and to end staging, as we want to, the review body must come up with recommendations that allow the NHS to live within its means.

Ambulance Service

2. **Mrs. Helen Brinton** (Peterborough): If he will make a statement on the Government's plans for the ambulance service. [57350]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): We are committed to modernising the NHS and improving services to patients, including ambulance services. Our plans include achieving faster and more appropriate response times for patients, including wider use of call prioritisation.

Mrs. Brinton: Is my hon. Friend aware of the grave concerns surrounding the performance of the East Anglian Ambulance NHS trust which serves my constituency and is currently under investigation by the regional health authority? Ambulance staff are frightened to speak out about what they know is wrong. Does my hon. Friend agree that the days of gagging clauses ended when the Labour Government were elected in 1997? Will my hon. Friend assure me that, under this Government, my constituents can rely on a top-quality ambulance service, and that all NHS staff will be respected as well as protected? *[Interruption.]* I do not find those desires funny.

Mr. Hutton: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurances that she seeks. As she will be aware, the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), has already written to chairmen of NHS trusts and health authorities on that issue. Confidentiality clauses discriminate against staff's rights and responsibilities to bring unacceptable practices into the open and there is no place for them in the NHS. NHS employers are expected to allow their staff maximum freedom of speech, consistent with their obligation to maintain patient confidentiality. I am sure that my hon. Friend will also be aware that the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which will come into effect in January 1999, will, for the

first time, provide statutory protection for employees who are subject to a detriment as a result of blowing the whistle.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Can the Minister assure the House that the Government will ensure that 999 ambulance calls are always responded to by blue-light ambulances?

Mr. Hutton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the Audit Commission's recent conclusions on that. It is sensible to answer life-threatening emergencies first. Matching resources to clinical needs will help us to improve emergency care. Call prioritisation is about when, not whether, to send an ambulance.

NHS (Development)

3. **Mr. Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): What steps he is taking to ensure that young people are consulted on the future development of the NHS. [57351]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): The involvement of all who use the health service, young and old, is essential in rebuilding a public service that is open and accountable to the people whom it serves, shaped by their experience and responsive to their needs. That is why the voice of patients will be heard at every level, whether through primary care groups, the national institute for clinical excellence or the increased involvement of local people on trust boards. That involvement is part of building a national health service in which people have confidence—no longer one governed by a take-it-or-leave-it attitude, or where people are treated as numbers, but a partnership to build quality and responsiveness.

Mr. Goggins: I thank my right hon. Friend for that detailed and encouraging response. May I draw her attention to Manchester's healthy school initiative, under which 50 school children recently communicated their views about the national health service directly to managers and providers in south Manchester? Does she agree that such events are important in ensuring that young people have a say, and because they can lead to real improvements in the delivery of health care services?

Ms Jowell: I commend the initiative of my hon. Friend's health authority. It is part of the health action zone, and I hope that that example of the involvement of young people in developing the national health service is one which other health authorities will seek to copy.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Many young people would regard the Minister's response as totally at variance with their experience locally. There may be a consultation exercise for NHS development, but all too often it is a total charade. The wishes of thousands of people, including young people, appear to be ignored. What practical steps will the Minister take to ensure that their wishes are translated into action inasmuch as they pay for the health service and those in my constituency want to see their local hospital, Mount Vernon, built up rather than run down?

Ms Jowell: Perhaps one of the most important changes that has marked the past 18 months is that consultation in the NHS no longer means simply a period of time. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that, where a consultation is undertaken and the views expressed are completely disregarded, people's confidence in the process will begin to diminish. We regard consultation and the views of those who use the health service as essential to developing it, which is why, for the first time in the history of the NHS, we are now conducting a patient survey of about 100,000 people who are being asked about their views and experiences of the service. The feedback from that survey will be vital in assessing the performance of the health service against the national performance framework.

The hon. Gentleman had better accept that nothing effective happened to involve local people, young or old, under the previous Government. We are developing a programme of consultation and partnership with people who use the health service.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Has my right hon. Friend considered communicating with young people, especially young women, through the medium of their magazines? A visit to any newsagent would show how many such magazines are published. Is she not disturbed when she analyses their contents? There may be a lot about breast enhancement surgery, but there is very little about the dangers of smoking or the causes of breast cancer and other cancers. Given that young women do not read newspapers, will my right hon. Friend use those magazines to get through to them?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why I have recently had two meetings with the editors of teenage magazines, at which we discussed young people and smoking, and young people and teenage pregnancy. He is right that, if we want young people to listen and to hear what we have to say, it is much better if the information comes from the magazines that they read and the people to whom they relate rather than from middle-aged Ministers.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): In projecting to young people the future developments of the national health service, will the Minister bear in mind the need to project the attractiveness of NHS careers for nurses, dentists and doctors? Unless that is done more positively and the attractions are underlined more effectively, there is a danger that there will not be enough people to train for that important work.

Ms Jowell: That is absolutely right. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State recently launched a competition for school children specifically to awaken their interest in a career in the national health service. We must inspire young people with the prospects that a career in the NHS can offer. If any young people in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency would like to enter the competition, it is still open.

Beta-interferon

4. **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): What representations he has received concerning the funding of beta–interferon; and if he will make a statement. [57352]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): In the past 18 months, the Department's records show that we received 177 written representations from Members of Parliament, patients' groups and the public about the prescribing and funding of beta-interferon. I also met representatives of the Multiple Sclerosis Society in May.

Most health authorities now have procedures in place by which patients can receive treatment with beta-interferon. More generally, the Government want greater consistency in the delivery of cost-effective clinical services to patients, wherever they live.

Mr. Barnes: Is the Minister aware that many MS patients in North Derbyshire have been prescribed beta-interferon, but have been lucky enough to receive it only if they are in the top eight on the list for treatment; have successfully pursued a court case, as one of my constituents has; or have decided to go private until the money runs out, such as Lesley Coombes of Ashover? Reassessments have been made to take off the list between 40 and 50 people who had hoped to receive beta-interferon. Is there not a case for earmarked resources for such authorities as North Derbyshire so that it can handle that massive problem?

Mr. Milburn: I would be very glad to look into the individual case that my hon. Friend has highlighted, and I hope that North Derbyshire health authority feels in a rather more comfortable financial position as a result of today's extra allocation of resources. The extra £13.9 million that my hon. Friend's health authority will receive next year represents a cash increase of 6.6 per cent.

I know that my hon. Friend has not done so, but it is terribly important that no one raises any false expectations about the ability of beta-interferon or any other drug to combat an extremely debilitating and distressing condition. Beta-interferon is not a cure for multiple sclerosis; there is no cure for it. The evidence seems to suggest that some patients with a particular form of the disease can benefit briefly from the use of beta-interferon. Sadly, the evidence also suggests that those short-term improvements are not always sustained. The Department will be commissioning new research into the appropriate usage of beta-interferon, and we will be issuing new guidelines before too long to ensure greater national consistency in the uptake of the drug.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Given the inconsistent availability of beta-interferon, does the right hon. Gentleman continue to believe that there is no such thing as rationing in the national health service?

Mr. Milburn: Opposition Members are in terrible danger of fermenting a crisis on this issue in the national health service. It is important to remember that for the vast majority of patients, in the vast majority of places, for the vast majority of the time, the vast majority of treatments are available on the national health service. Under this Government they will continue to be available on the NHS.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I know that the Minister is aware of the work on beta-interferon by Professor Blumhardt in Nottingham. I understand that the prism trials have now been published in *The Lancet*. I support the argument for earmarking funds, but will my right hon. Friend's assessment take account of the study in *The Lancet*? Will he introduce consistency to the prescribing process in decisions about whether beta-interferon is appropriate for MS sufferers?

Mr. Milburn: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The products currently on the market are for a particular form of MS—the relapsing, remitting form—whereas the article in *The Lancet* is about the more serious, progressive form. The product to which my hon. Friend referred has not yet been licensed through the European procedures, let alone in this country. It is our intention to examine all beta-interferon products to achieve the greater national consistency in prescribing that all right hon. and hon. Members want.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): First, may I welcome the Under–Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) to the Dispatch Box for the first time? He has important responsibilities, and I assure him that we have every intention of keeping him as busy as possible.

Many people will question the Minister's answer to his hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), and he did not answer the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe). Will he admit that there is rationing in the national health service? There always has been, although the Secretary of State persistently refuses to admit that. The inconsistency in the availability of beta-interferon and many other inconsistent availabilities in the national health service prove that. If the Minister is not prepared to admit that there is rationing, there is no way that we can have a grown-up debate about the future of the health service. Will he admit it now?

Mr. Milburn: I am not sure that grown-up debates and the hon. Gentleman are always as compatible as they should be. The real reason why the Opposition are seeking to foment a debate about rationing is not beta-interferon, but the Conservative party's failure to match our record levels of investment in the national health service. It is about time the Opposition came clean. If they are not prepared to match pound for pound the extra investment in the hon. Gentleman's health authority and others, they should list item by item, procedure by procedure and treatment by treatment, those patients who will lose out and will not now be treated on the NHS, and will be forced to go private. The difference between the hon. Gentleman's party and the Labour party is that we believe in treatment being available according to clinical need and not ability to pay.

Waiting Lists

5. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): If he will make a statement on the investment he is making to reduce NHS waiting lists over the next three years. [57353]

6. **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): If he will estimate the total cost of his planned reduction in waiting lists; when he expects to achieve that reduction; and if he will make a statement. [57354]

12. **Mr. Tom Cox** (Tooting): If he will make a statement on his Department's funding for reductions in NHS waiting lists over the next three years. [57361]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): Waiting lists have fallen by more than 98,000 since April. The Government are investing an extra £21 billion in the national health service over the next three years, and I announced today the main allocation of next year's funds to health authorities, amounting to a total of £31 billion. That includes £320 million specifically for reducing waiting lists, to help us to deliver our promise to reduce them to a total 100,000 lower than the total that we inherited.

The extra allocation announced today for Coventry—which covers the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham)—is £13.7 million. The extra allocation for West Surrey, which covers the constituency of the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), is £19 million. As for the two health authorities that serve the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham will receive an extra £38 million, while Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth will receive an extra £25 million. All that is in addition to what the Tories planned to provide.

Mr. Cunningham: I am sure that many people, not only in Coventry but throughout the country, will welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Is he aware that the shadow Chancellor has said that our investment in the national health service is reckless, and that the shadow Secretary of State for Health has said that it is a waste of time spending money on waiting lists? What is more appropriate—the investment of money in reducing waiting lists or the recklessness of the Tories in not investing any money at all?

Mr. Dobson: I fully expect all honest Tory Members to say now that, as the shadow Chancellor says that our health spending is reckless, they do not want the money to be spent in their constituencies.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I congratulate the Secretary of State on attempting to match the previous Government's record of real increases in health spending. May I point out, however, that the number of patients waiting for more than 12 months has risen by more than 30,000? Will the right hon. Gentleman now admit that the only reason for the general decline in waiting lists is that simple, quick operations are being performed before longer, more complex ones?

Mr. Dobson: No—and the number of people waiting for more than 12 months for treatment has fallen by 9,000 since June this year.

Mr. Cox: I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. It is very different from the statements that I heard under the last Administration: in those days we repeatedly sought meetings with Secretaries of State, only to be told, "No money is available for your area".

Are not the facts that there is extra money, that more people are being treated and that waiting lists are being reduced a clear indication of this Government's commitment? I hope that my right hon. Friend will announce those facts not just in the House but throughout the country, because it is not just areas such as mine that are benefiting from the Government's policy: the whole country is benefiting.

Mr. Dobson: I have to agree with my hon. Friend. The two health authorities that serve his constituency will receive more than £62 million extra to serve the people next year, which will bring spending in those two areas—many parts of which are very deprived—to nearly £8 billion. That is hugely in excess of the funds that the previous Government made available in the past, or intended to make available in the future. I am glad that we are doing this; I am proud that we are keeping our promises; and I am confident that the excellent 1 million staff in the health service will be able to deliver the better, quicker, more efficient top-quality health service that we all want.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, when he said yesterday in the House that patients waiting for the removal of internal fixations have never been included in official waiting list statistics, he was utterly incorrect?

Mr. Dobson: No.

Miss Widdecombe: Then can the right hon. Gentleman explain why a very clear memorandum issued by Bradford hospitals trust makes it clear that before June, when these convenient falls began to happen, such patients were included in its monthly statistics, whereas after that they were not?

Mr. Dobson: As for the practices in Bradford, I have no control over what that trust has been doing directly, but, as I explained to the right hon. Lady yesterday, the rules that were introduced by her Government, whether they are being complied with in Bradford or not, stated that, if someone with a broken arm had a metal plate inserted and was told by his doctor, "You need it in for 18 months, so you do not come back to have it removed for a further 18 months," that person did not count as someone who was waiting for an operation for 18 months. The previous Government were daft in a lot of respects, but they were perfectly sensible when they said that such people should not be included on the waiting lists.

Miss Widdecombe: We may have been perfectly sensible in suggesting that such operations should not be included in the monthly returns, but the fact is that they continued to be so in some authorities, including Bradford. They have now been taken out of the monthly returns, so part of the fall in waiting lists announced by the right hon. Gentleman can be accounted for by patients who have not actually received their treatment.

Will the right hon. Gentleman now do three things? First, will he admit that his statement yesterday was incorrect? Secondly, will he apologise to the nation for making it and, thirdly, will he admit that an awful lot of those drops in waiting lists up and down the country represent numbers being fiddled and patients being diddled?

Mr. Dobson: Up and down the country, in the first six months of this year, 250,000 more people were treated by the national health service than were being treated in the equivalent half of last year, and the year before that. The right hon. Lady apparently wants us to include in waiting lists people whose doctors have said that they should not have an operation for six, 12 or 18 months. To repeat

what I said yesterday, to advocate that is just as daft as suggesting that a woman who discovers she is pregnant today should count on the waiting list for the next nine months.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (Telford): I warmly welcome the 3.92 per cent. increase in real expenditure that my right hon. Friend has made available to Shropshire health authority. I ask him to remember, as the House will remember, that each month that the waiting lists increased was met by vociferous criticism from the Opposition. I ask him therefore to place in the Library all the letters of congratulation that he will receive from Opposition Members now that waiting lists are falling.

Mr. Dobson: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Commons Librarian will not need to set aside much shelf space for that purpose, but I am sure that, in common with their elected representative, people in Shropshire will be glad to know that they will benefit from an extra £15 million towards their health care next year. That, of course, is merely the first round of the available extra money.

Mr. James Paice (South–East Cambridgeshire): Does the Secretary of State recognise that, however hard the NHS works, it has to have a throughput on beds? How on earth could the NHS in Cambridgeshire expect to fulfil its obligations when the right hon. Gentleman granted the local social services £1 million less in cash terms in their standard spending assessment? We now have serious problems, particularly with elderly people who remain in hospital beds long after they should simply because social services have no money to fund their care outside?

Mr. Dobson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will therefore welcome the extra £250 million that the Chancellor announced next week—

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Next week?

Mr. Dobson: I meant last week. I must not give the game away. I hope that the hon. Member for South–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) will therefore welcome that £250 million extra, which will help local social service departments, hospitals and the rest of the national health service. That money will ensure that people, particularly frail, elderly people who should not be in hospital if they could be properly looked after at home will receive such care at home, and that those in hospital who could be discharged if there was someone to look after them at home will also be properly cared for in their own home. That is what that £250 million is for.

In Cambridgeshire, as in other parts of the country, people working in the national health service and in social services departments did a brilliant job last winter with slightly less money and I expect them to do an even better job with a bit more money.

Medical Audit

7. **Mr. Nigel Beard** (Bexleyheath and Crayford): If he will make a statement on progress in establishing a system of medically auditing the effectiveness of various therapies employed in the NHS. [57355]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): In July we published "A First Class Service" which set our plans to establish the new national institute for clinical excellence early next year.

For the first time, NHS professional staff and their patients will be able to look to a single authoritative source for clear guidance about the effectiveness of therapies.

Mr. Beard: I welcome my right hon. Friend's answer and the long overdue steps that are now being taken to disseminate best practice throughout the national health service with the national institute for clinical excellence and the Commission for Health Improvement. Does my hon. Friend agree that the rapid development of medically relevant biotechnology is now likely to provide new therapies that mimic the body's own biochemical processes, allowing the early diagnosis of disease and providing indications of predisposition to disease in certain circumstances, all of which are likely to revolutionise medical practice? Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that new arrangements for medical audit will promote the early introduction of those innovations into the NHS and that there will be the fullest collaboration between the NHS and British companies and research organisations to progress those new developments towards medical use?

Mr. Milburn: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. As he rightly said, we could be on the verge of some extremely exciting medical breakthroughs that will revolutionise patient care and the life chances of thousands, if not millions, of patients. It is important, therefore, that we achieve our aim, which is to ensure the introduction of more effective treatments into the national health service more quickly than has been possible before. We will do that through the national institute for clinical excellence and our new national service frameworks. We will also do it by abolishing the old internal market which inhibited collaboration and so fragmented decision making that we ended up with thousands of competing health units instead of a single national health service. We want to see a single national health service, providing care according to clinical need rather than depending on where a patient lives or who happens to be their GP.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Is the Minister aware that one direct casualty of the abolition of GP fundholding and a move to commissioning groups has been the provision of physiotherapy services? In West Sussex, many of my constituents who need physiotherapy because they are elderly or have suffered severe accidents are now faced with either not having those essential services or having to pay for them privately, which many of them cannot afford to do.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about that. Before too long—hopefully within the next three weeks—

we will be issuing new guidance to health authorities and to primary care groups in their shadow form, urging them to ensure the retention of proven and effective services provided by GP fundholding, and that their benefits are spread to all patients. We want to see a levelling up, not a levelling down. In particular, we want to see the end of the two-tier system that GP fundholding introduced into the NHS.

Booked Admissions

8. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): What action he is taking to promote booked admission pilots in the NHS. [57356]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): On 24 September I announced 24 pilot schemes to develop systems of booked admissions so that patients can arrange to go into hospital at times that suit them. A total of £5 million pounds has been made available this year and £20 million will be provided for further schemes next year. We hope that, eventually, the entire system will go nationwide.

Mr. Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that, as my constituents can book their holidays and various appointments by telephone, it is about time that they were also able to book by telephone their hospital appointments, rather than waiting anxiously for that brown paper envelope through the letter box?

Mr. Dobson: I certainly agree with that. It is a strange irony that it is difficult for people to make bookings and other arrangements in the national health service—which, for more than 50 years, has served the United Kingdom 24 hours a day, every day of the year—because of its communications system.

We want to enable people who have been told by their GP, "I think you need an out-patient appointment, because they should do some tests at the hospital," to be able—there and then, from the GP's premises—to book an out-patient appointment that suits them. At an out-patient appointment, if they are told by the specialist, "I think you'd better come in as an in-patient," they should—again, there and then—be able to make a booking, preferably for a day of the week and time of the year that suits them. Such a change would be a good step forward and would in many ways reflect the fact that, although services are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, the system gives a different impression.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): We welcome development of a booked admissions system. However, booked admissions will help only those who are fortunate enough to have secured a specialist out-patient appointment to get on to the waiting list initially. The Secretary of State has been asked repeatedly to publish figures on the number of people waiting for out-patient appointments. The figures are already collected and reported to the NHS executive by hospital trusts; all he has to do is to add up the figures. Is not the reason why he refuses to publish the figures that they will show that, taken as a whole—elective surgery and specialist out-patient waiting lists together—NHS waiting lists are going up, not down as he would have us believe?

Mr. Dobson: I have heard of people trying to change the goalposts once the match has started, but the hon. Gentleman seems to want to change the stadium. In the first six months of this year, the national health service dealt with 67,000 more out-patients than previously.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): What about out-patients?

Mr. Dobson: If the right hon. Lady would just keep quiet and let those who are supposed to answer the questions do so, and stick to her appointed job of asking questions, we might get somewhere.

There is some evidence of a build-up in the number of people waiting for out-patient appointments. We have never denied that. I am asking managers and others in the national health service to make use of the additional funds that we are providing to deal with waiting lists and the £250 million extra that we are providing to deal with the winter to try to pay more attention to those people.

Hitherto, figures have been collected on a basis established by the previous Government—to show how well the then Government were doing in meeting the patients charter. Those figures have been collected, and they will continue to be published. However, I should like to move towards more detailed and up-to-date figures. It is very revealing that the new Government have not only started publishing monthly in-patient waiting list figures but, for the first time, have started collecting such figures monthly. The hapless crew on the Conservative Benches collected the figures only once every three months.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): May I, on behalf of my GP colleagues across the country, welcome my right hon. Friend's initiative in ensuring that patients will be able to book out-patients appointments directly from GPs' surgeries? May I also ask him to ensure that, once the initiative has been implemented, out-patient appointments will be booked on the basis of clinical need, to ensure that patients who need to be seen as soon as possible are fast-tracked through the system—thereby eliminating a very significant cause of waiting?

Mr. Dobson: Ever since we were elected, we have tried to make it clear that clinical need should be the major determinant of how quickly people are treated. I hope that, as the information technology system becomes more sophisticated, doctors' and other clinicians' capacity to express their views, and to have their views heeded, will be improved, as that will be to the benefit of everyone. Both patients and those who treat patients like to know that everyone is being treated fairly. People are comfortable doing something that they believe to be fair, and very uncomfortable if asked to do something that they do not think is fair.

Tobacco White Paper

9. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): When the White Paper on tobacco will be published. [57357]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): Soon.

Mr. Rendel: Given that there are now hundreds of deaths every day from tobacco-related diseases, does the Minister agree that it is vital to discourage children from ever taking up smoking in the first place and that school nurses have an important part to play in that? What steps does she intend to take to ensure that there are no further cuts in the community school nursing service such as, sadly, are now threatened in Berkshire?

Ms Jowell: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of protecting children from the impact of tobacco advertising and of taking every effective step to make it very hard for them to get hold of cigarettes. However, there is more to it than that—we have to change young people's attitude towards cigarettes and, in turn, change their behaviour, making them not want to buy cigarettes. I entirely agree that school nurses have a very important role to play in this, as do parents and teachers and the whole range of professionals with whom children come into contact. Measures to prevent children from smoking are already an important part of the healthy schools programme and will feature very specifically in the tobacco White Paper.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the answer that she gave to the initial question simply means that the frustration felt for many months now by the health lobby will continue? However, more important than the publication of the White Paper is that it should be comprehensive and should address the issues around smoking, which has for decades been the biggest killer in this country. I am pleased that we now have a Government who are prepared to take on these issues on behalf of the public.

Ms Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend and pay tribute to the very great efforts that he made while in opposition to try to protect children from the impact of tobacco advertising. It is in no small part due to his efforts that we now have, for the first time, a comprehensive Europe-wide ban on the advertising and promotion of tobacco. The way in which that will be implemented in the United Kingdom will be set out in detail in the forthcoming White Paper. There is impatience about the publication of the White Paper and getting the policy implemented. We have worked with impatience and a sense of urgency over the past 18 months because absolutely nothing was done in the previous 18 years.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): If the Minister believes that school nurses have an important role to play in this and other respects, will she explain why Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority has effectively abolished the role of school nurses? Will she undertake to evaluate what the adverse implications of that have been before other health authorities, such as that mentioned by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), go down the same path?

Ms Jowell: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will be pleased that his constituents will be receiving £14.7 million more for their health care, which will go some way to dealing with precisely the problems that he identifies. Yes, I do think that the contribution of health visitors and school nurses should be effectively evaluated so that we can ensure that what they do is based on the best possible evidence that it will work in practice.

NHS Direct

10. **Miss Melanie Johnson** (Welwyn Hatfield): If he will estimate the number of people to be covered by NHS Direct by April 1999. [57359]

15. **Mr. Alan Johnson** (Hull, West and Hessle): If he will estimate the number of people to be covered by NHS Direct by April 1999. [57364]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The second wave of NHS Direct, which will be operational by April next year, will cover 20 million people, or more than 40 per cent. of the population of England.

Miss Johnson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. My constituents and I are green with envy that coverage is being achieved elsewhere in the country. As the millennium is approaching, and given the potential of NHS Direct in changing the way in which the ambulance service works and the demands upon it, may I have an assurance that my constituents will have NHS Direct by 2000? May I have a pledge from my hon. Friend?

Mr. Milburn: Yes. Like all our pledges, it will be kept. We are a Government who keep our promises. By the end of 2000, NHS Direct will be available in my hon. Friend's community and in every community in the land. The Government have made available an extra £44 million to spread the availability of NHS Direct, not just to second-wave areas but beyond, to ensure that all communities have the benefit of instant access to 24-hour, 365-day-a-year care from expert nurses at the end of a telephone. That is already proving its worth in many communities and we are determined to spread its benefits everywhere.

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): Will the Minister confirm whether the general public will be able to use the telephone line to ask why the research and development budget has been cut by £10 million, which has been switched to the hospital waiting lists initiative? Will my constituents be able to use the telephone line to ask why, as a result of Government pressure, a local orthopaedic consultant has cancelled an out-patient clinic in order to carry out operations and that, as a result, the waiting time for outpatients has risen from 26 weeks to 40 weeks? Are my constituents right to believe that the figures are being fiddled?

Mr. Milburn: No. The hon. Gentleman's constituents are wrong. That is not the appropriate use for NHS Direct. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that his health authority will receive an extra £28 million as a consequence of my right hon. Friend's decisions today. I hope that he and his constituents will welcome that.

Acute Beds

11. **Mr. Bill Michie** (Sheffield, Heeley): What action he is taking to identify the number and use of acute beds in the NHS. [57360]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 30 September the establishment of a national inquiry into hospital beds. This work is already well under way within the Department and the findings will be published next spring.

Mr. Michie: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and for the £367 million plus to Sheffield health authority. The money will certainly help and it is very welcome. May I raise the issue of mental illness, which to a large extent is still considered to be the Cinderella service within the national health service? It needs special attention at present and I am asking whether that would be possible.

Ms Jowell: Obviously, my hon. Friend raises an important point. Certainly it is absolutely crucial to have an adequate number of psychiatric beds to ensure that mental health services can meet and respond to the range of needs in psychiatric patients—for example, by providing day care services locally. My hon. Friend will be aware that an expert group is drawing up a national service framework in order to develop a proper national framework for the delivery of psychiatric services. His point about ensuring an adequate number of beds in relation to those provided for other services will be part of that consideration.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the figures for acute beds in the NHS specify how many of them will be in mixed-sex wards in acute psychiatric units? Does the Minister recall the Secretary of State's categorical pledge to me earlier this year that he would put a stop to the building of any new mixed-sex wards in psychiatric units? How does she square that pledge with advice given by the NHS executive to Goodmayes hospital which restates all the old discredited arguments in favour of mixed-sex wards in such units?

Ms Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stopped the development of a mixed-sex ward last time the subject was raised in the House. He will do the same again, if the hon. Gentleman would like to supply details.

NHS Hospitals (Funding)

13. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What was the average annual real-terms percentage increase in funding for NHS hospitals between 1979 and 1997; and what is the equivalent figure planned for the next three years. [57362]

14. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley): What was the average annual real-terms percentage increase in funding for hospitals in the NHS between 1979 and 1997; and what is the equivalent figure for the next three years. [57363]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): During the years 1979–80 to 1997–98, the annual average real-terms increase in NHS total net expenditure in England was 3.1 per cent. On 14 July, I announced the Government's investment of an extra £21 billion in the NHS—an average of 4.7 per cent. above inflation over the next three years. Next year's allocation, which was announced today, will mean an extra £9.7 million for the health service in South Lancashire and £12.5 million in Northumberland.

Mr. Borrow: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, which demonstrates the Labour Government's commitment to the NHS. I am concerned that residents of South Ribble have to wait 18 months for drug rehabilitation treatment. The Government have announced an extra £12 million for drug advisory services next year. Will my right hon. Friend join me in urging South Lancashire health authority to give a higher priority to drug services? Reducing the waiting lists would have beneficial effects for the health service and important implications for crime.

Mr. Dobson: We have included some earmarked funds to deal with drug treatment over-subscription and drug misuse. I hope that that will benefit my hon. Friend's area.

Mr. Campbell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Stephen Thornton, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, has described the level of investment in the health service as beyond his wildest dreams? How many more wonderful dreams does my right hon. Friend have up his sleeve for the health service?

Mr. Dobson: I have been called all sorts of things, but I have never been called a conjurer—so far. I am not sure that I have much left up my sleeve, or even up my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's sleeve—he has a rather more important sleeve than I do. When various pointy-headed academics, those on the Opposition Front Bench and the Liberal party were demanding an average increase over the next three years of 3 per cent., we came up with 4.7 per cent., but standards of courtesy have fallen so low that they never thanked us for it.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): The Secretary of State's announcement of more money for the health service is welcome to every hon. Member, but in Oxfordshire there is real concern about how much of the money will find its way into the local health service. At the Radcliffe infirmary, waiting lists for day in-patient treatment have risen by 119 per cent. in the past 18 months. At the Nuffield Orthopaedic hospital, only four people waited more than 12 months 18 months ago; today that figure has risen to 137 people. I have written four times to the Secretary of State on behalf of my constituents about the impending closure of Burford hospital, without receiving any replies. Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to reassure my constituents that he will not close a single bed in Witney and that he will save Burford from closure until he does something to reduce the calamitous rise of waiting lists in Oxfordshire?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman knows well that I shall eventually have to adjudicate on the propositions

being put forward by Oxfordshire health authority. I am prohibited from announcing my decisions until I have reached them, because I have to be fair to everyone. Today I met a delegation with the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) about one of the community hospitals in Oxfordshire. Other delegations are coming to see me. I shall listen carefully to them. My officials will confirm that, sometimes to their chagrin, I do not always agree with the proposals that are put to me. It will help that Oxfordshire will be receiving £22.5 million extra next year in order to provide services. Not every delay in Oxfordshire is to do with funding; some of it is to do with the way in which things are run.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): May I anticipate the right hon. Gentleman's response to my question by welcoming any new money that his Government are proposing to spend on Worcestershire health authority? Whatever that new amount may be, will it be enough to stop cuts that his Government are imposing on Worcestershire? Will it be enough to keep open the accident and emergency department at the Alexandra Healthcare NHS trust hospital in the constituency of his hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith)? Will it be enough to keep open the Kidderminster general hospital in the constituency of his hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock)? If there is not enough money to keep hospitals and A and E departments open, then it simply is not enough.

Mr. Dobson: I am glad to discover that at least one Conservative Member wants to be even more reckless than we are with public funds. She knows that proposals for changes in services in Worcestershire must come to me for decision. I shall announce my decision when I have taken it. The £18.2 million extra that Worcestershire will receive as a result of today's announcement ought to improve services and the performance of everybody in the county. That should benefit the people whom the hon. Lady represents. During debates on the next Finance Bill, I trust that she will be putting her feet where her mouth is and voting with us in the Lobby for the money that we are providing.

Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) (Amendment)

3.31 pm

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998 to require the Secretary of State to produce a report on reducing traffic levels to below 1997 levels by 2002.

Only a few months ago, I spent six or seven hours in Committee considering what was then called the Road Traffic Reduction (United Kingdom Targets) Bill—now, of course, the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998. During debates on that Bill, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), told hon. Members on at least seven occasions that the Government believed in reducing the level of traffic on the roads. That was no slip of the tongue. When questioned persistently by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on whether the Government intended to reduce traffic or merely slow down the rate at which traffic increased, she said:

"I thought that I had made the position clear . . . I shall have to be infinitely more precise in my choice of words . . . My argument—which, I am sure, will be endorsed by all Committee members—is that there should be a reduction in road traffic."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 18 March 1998; c. 55.]

That is hardly surprising; after all, the Under-Secretary was only repeating the policy on which Labour fought the election, the promise that she gave her constituents before the election and promises given in an interview in *The Guardian* by the Deputy Prime Minister. I shall come to those promises in detail later.

Why did the Under-Secretary tell my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) just one week ago that she intended merely to "reduce traffic growth"? She knows as well as every hon. Member that that falls far short of what she, her colleagues and her party promised before and since the election, and during the election campaign—promises that have been repeated in the House. That is why I am introducing the Bill.

The Bill requires the Government to ensure that, when they publish reports under the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998, they set out policies and measures aimed at reducing traffic over the lifetime of this Parliament. It is a matter of deep concern that I have to introduce the Bill, but I am so rapidly losing confidence in the Government's intention to keep their promises on traffic reduction that I am left with no alternative.

The Government must be tough on pollution and tough on the causes of pollution, especially as, since the election, the World Health Organisation guidelines on nitrogen dioxide have been exceeded more than 110 times; on ozone, 472 times; and on sulphur dioxide, more than 80 times.

The Government fought the election promising that they would "reduce and then reverse" traffic growth. That promise appeared on Labour's election internet site, in their policy handbook and in policy briefings sent out by Millbank to voters. The message is clear—that they will "reduce and then reverse" traffic growth. Reversing traffic growth means reducing the number of cars and lorries on our roads. There can be no doubt about that.

The Deputy Prime Minister confirmed that policy shortly after the election, when he told *The Guardian* on 6 June 1997:

"I will have failed if in five years time there are not many more people using public transport and far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order, but I urge you to hold me to it."

His hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate was also clear about her belief in reducing traffic. In the run-up to the general election, and at the request of constituents, she signed early-day motion 289, which called for a 10 per cent. traffic reduction target. Two weeks later, in Hampstead high street, she signed a national petition, for which signatures were being collected by the local Friends of the Earth group, calling for exactly the same targets. She could not have made it clearer to those voting for her that she believed that traffic levels in Britain should be reduced.

The hon. Lady also made it clear during the passage of the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill that the Government supported reducing traffic. Not only did she state the Government's support for traffic reduction on at least seven occasions: she actually urged Committee members to vote against an amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Christchurch that focused on what he correctly called the "vital issue" of the difference between road traffic reduction and reducing the rate of increase of road traffic. Despite all that, the White Paper failed to set out policies to achieve traffic reduction. In paragraph 2.24, it stated clearly:

"The New Deal for Transport therefore sets the framework to reduce traffic growth."

Again, Ministers know that that is a step backwards.

I challenged the Deputy Prime Minister on that point at Question Time a couple of weeks ago, when I asked whether he would keep his promise to *The Guardian*, and Labour's pre-election promises. His reply was clear:

"I agree to keep to that commitment: judge my performance in five years".—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 1071.]

Yet, only days later, his Under-Secretary was saying the opposite in a written answer:

"in order to tackle the congestion and pollution that is caused by road traffic, we need to reduce the rate of road traffic growth. "—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1998; Vol. 318, c. *458*.]

Not only does that break her repeated earlier promises, but it is patently rubbish. Tackling congestion by planning to allow more cars on the road, which is what this policy means, is a policy doomed to fail.

The White Paper predicts that, over the next 20 years, traffic could grow by over one third. The Under-Secretary promises that she will slow that growth. If she reduces it to 30 per cent., will she claim that as a success? Will she claim that congestion has been relieved? Will she admit that she fought the election promising a 10 per cent. reduction in traffic, and achieved 30 per cent. growth instead?

The signals that the Government are planning to backtrack on their election promises are strong. The Under-Secretary seems keen to ditch her own promises, too—a warning sign, perhaps, to voters in the London mayoral election, and one to which I can promise the Liberal Democrats will draw people's attention.

The Deputy Prime Minister at least restated his promise to me last week, yet even his own Ministers seem determined to undermine him, and we have all heard about the teenyboppers at No. 10 destroying his radical intentions.

Against that background, my Bill is crucial. As the Under-Secretary told the House on 24 April 1998:

"The country cannot continue as it is—there must be a reduction in road traffic."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 1119.]

I urge all Members of the House to support the Bill.

Labour Members, in particular, should back it. I believe that it is a Prescott Bill, as it would put the words of the Deputy Prime Minister into statute. Let the House remember his words:

"I will have failed if in five years time there are not many more people using public transport and far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order, but I urge you to hold me to it."

My Bill will hold him to it. I hope that the House will support it enthusiastically.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tom Brake, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Norman Baker and Mr. Andrew Stunell.

ROAD TRAFFIC REDUCTION (NATIONAL TARGETS) (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Tom Brake accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998 to require the Secretary of State to produce a report on reducing traffic levels to below 1997 levels by 2002: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 257].

Factory Closures

Madam Speaker: I must inform the House that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.40 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I beg to move,

That this House is concerned about the continued spate of factory closures and job losses; condemns the Government's failure to take urgent action to give manufacturing a chance; believes that this Government's actions in increasing business taxes and regulation have made the position worse; asks the Government to explain how far they will go in implementing the McKinsey Report on productivity; and urges the Government to change policy before more jobs are lost.

We urge the House to use this opportunity today to have a serious discussion on the current problems in manufacturing business. I would be surprised if Labour Members felt so strongly that they would wish to break their word to the Whips and vote for our motion, although it is framed in a way that they should find entirely acceptable—it is about the present and the future, and it urges the Government to do something to help all those manufacturing companies that are now in trouble.

I am a realist—I do not see many brave souls on the Labour Benches who are about to vote for our motion. However, I hope that they will use this opportunity in the debate to speak for their constituents and the companies in their constituencies. We know that they are suffering and that they need a strong voice in Parliament. We will be that voice from the Opposition Benches, but we think that it is time for some voices from the Government Benches to tell the Government the truth about the factory closures and job losses.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): If we are to have a sensible debate about the future, we must remember the past. Why was manufacturing standing at 30 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1979 and down to less than 20 per cent. when the Conservative party left office?

Mr. Redwood: Gross domestic product went up massively and the service sector grew even more rapidly, therefore increasing its share of the action. However, I know the argument that will come from the Government. We have heard it many times, so let us do the routine quickly so we do not waste too much time on it. Yes, we got it wrong in the early 1990s. Yes, the Labour party fully supported the actions we then took. Yes, we have apologised. That is not the point of today's debate. There has been a general election since then, and many things have changed.

The new leadership of the Conservative party wants to look to the future and offer heartfelt advice, based on our successes and our mistakes during our period in office. I hope that that means that the Secretary of State can now ditch most of his speech and tell us about the present situation—in which manufacturing is suffering—and the actions that he may take with his right hon. Friends to make things better for manufacturing.

Yesterday was just another day in the sorry progress of manufacturing under the Government. ICI closed a works in Billingham. Cooper's tools transferred its

[Mr. Redwood]

manufacturing to Germany and to Mexico from that important plant in Washington new town in the north-east. I hope that the Secretary of State understood that—the company closed the plant down not because of a worldwide shortage in demand but because it thought that it was cheaper to make things in Germany.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the north-east. In my constituency, Wilkinson Sword, the razor blade manufacturer—an American company—closed down entirely and invested in a company in Germany. When I asked the company why, I was told that it had nothing to do with the pound or with interest rates. The company said that it was cheaper to sack British workers than German workers.

Mr. Redwood: I would be surprised if that were the only explanation of the company's actions. Why would it want to sack the British workers? A company does not sack workers because it is cheaper to sack them here than somewhere else; it does so because it can no longer make money in the market concerned and in this country and thinks that it can benefit its business by transferring the work elsewhere.

If the hon. Gentleman is so worried about that factor, he should urge his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to do something about it. I do not agree with him about why Wilkinson Sword decided to pull out. It decided to pull out of the north-east, like many other firms that have done exactly the same in recent weeks and months, because the Government have made it too dear for manufacturers to make things in Britain and that area is suffering as a result—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members seem to deny that. Are they forgetting that Siemens has reduced its work force by 1,100 and cancelled a major plant and investment in the north-east? Three hundred and fifty jobs have gone from Wilkinson Sword, 600 at the Vickers tank factory, 2,000 at Claremont Garments, 500 at the British Oxygen Company, 730 at BASF and 660 at Grove Cranes. I have here a long list of job losses in the north-east since June, which I will not bore the House by reading. However, every one represents an industrial tragedy and a series of family tragedies for the people tied up in it. It is about time that the Government woke up to what is going on in the backyard of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in his constituency of Hartlepool.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): If, as the right hon. Gentleman says, every job lost is a tragedy, will he explain why, when he was in the previous Government, he allowed 8,000 manufacturing jobs to go from my area and never said one word about it?

Mr. Redwood: I never thought that the loss of manufacturing jobs was a good thing. The hon. Lady does not know what I was saying within the Government when we were facing those problems. We were governed by collective responsibility and, as I have said, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has acknowledged on behalf of the party that mistakes were made in the early 1990s. The fact that such mistakes have been made should be a reason for the Government to learn from them, not to crow about them and then make exactly the same mistakes or worse.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): We need to start looking forward, but let us try to strike a balance. The last two factories in which I worked have now been closed. The first closed in 1975, when I had the painful job of working with the people who were being made redundant to help them find other jobs. Before then, I had worked at a factory in the borders of Scotland that produced printed circuits. The Government have now ensured that that factory has to make all its workers in Selkirk and Galashiels redundant, but the Government's only comment is that we need more productivity. They do not understand, so they should stop sneering.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Our sadness is that fine jobs are going and fine factories are closing—factories that we fought to get in this country or that decided to locate and grow here because they liked the economic policies that were being pursued. So much of that good legacy has been dissipated in 18 short months under this Administration.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry strolls on the Copacabana in Rio, plays courtier to the Prince of Wales, opens a motor show early to suit his personal and social convenience and turns a blind eye to the true problems of British business. We hear him in blunder after blunder, saying that he is no fan of greasy overalls or of horny-handed toilers in industry. As one who has never worked in industry, he obviously finds it difficult to understand how one makes things and the sort of background that one needs to do so profitably and to sell them abroad.

The right hon. Gentleman has become the Minister for manufacturing recession and the Minister for factory closures. He still thinks that he can spin enough to spin business out of trouble, but the more he spins with the odd piece of good news, the more ridiculous he looks and the more interest there is throughout the country in gloomy survey after gloomy survey and closure after closure.

Ms Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): Has the right hon. Gentleman spoken recently to the Chemical Industries Association Ltd? Three of its members are located in my constituency. When I spoke to the chief executive last night, he expressed serious concern that the Opposition were talking down the economy and the industry. He said that he was having to make considerable efforts to counteract the effects of that talking down, which is damaging his markets.

Mr. Redwood: It is a case of the Government doing down the chemical industry, not of the Opposition talking it down. My colleagues and I have been scrupulously careful never to talk us into a recession. Whenever I have been invited by broadcasters to go that bit further and predict an overall recession here, I have said that I do not wish to do so because I have no wish to make things worse than they already are.

It defies both logic and evidence, however, to say that there are no problems in manufacturing industry. I hope that the hon. Lady reads the surveys. I hope that she has

read the profit and loss figures being reported. I hope that she has read all the news of closures and redundancies. If she has read and understood any of that, she will realise that we are not talking industry into problems. The problems are real, and they are immediate. It is up to the Government to change their policies before they do even more damage.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that not just manufacturing is affected? The retail trade, in which I have an interest, is also being hit. We do not want to talk down the economy, but one of the first things that one learns in business is to identify a problem, admit to it and deal with it. The Government singularly fail to do that.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that the debate will persuade the Government to recognise, even at this late hour, that there is a problem. We are not making it up. The Confederation of British Industry, the other big business institutes and companies up and down the country share that view. One need only read Ceefax or the financial pages day after day to see how serious the problems are.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): It may help my right hon. Friend to know of some headlines in the *Shropshire Star*: in September, "County dole figures show a sharp rise" and, in October, "300 workers take pay cut". The latter story noted:

"More than 300 workers at a Shropshire company are to take a pay cut to save their jobs."

A week later, the front-page headline was "Rover crisis hits county". The difficulties are real. There is no use the Government pretending that there is no crisis. The crisis is here, and it is affecting people's jobs in Shropshire.

Mr. Redwood: Many of my hon. Friends could make equally powerful points about their constituencies. The problems are real, and the Government must listen to us.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State likens himself to John the Baptist. I think that John the Baptist was closer to being an atheist than the Secretary of State is to understanding British manufacturers. He has invited us all not to a baptism, but to a funeral for British industry. He will discover that his enthusiasm to drive the story of factory closures out of newspapers and off the media will backfire terribly. There is so much worry in the country that the media will have to pick up that concern despite the right hon. Gentleman's guidance to the contrary that it is of no interest to people outside the House.

I trust that, when the Secretary of State speaks, he will not play too heavily on the welcome news of new jobs in construction announced by British Petroleum yesterday. We need lots of such announcements, because, by its nature, construction work expires every time a contract finishes. New contracts are always needed to keep construction workers in employment. The Secretary of State should not be confused into thinking that those jobs are new jobs in manufacturing or chemicals. The jobs tally for BP's investment is plus 225 new jobs for the new plant when it is up and running, but minus 150 jobs at Baglan, where there will be a compensating closure. The sum of the good news for the chemical industry is a gain of 75 jobs, but that small, though welcome, announcement was more than swamped by yesterday's other announcements of losses elsewhere in manufacturing.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My right hon. Friend is advancing a powerful case. In support of it, will he recall the simple, salient fact that there have been 19,000 job losses since the Secretary of State assumed his post?

Mr. Redwood: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that intelligence. I had not counted the figures up in that way, but his figure sounds entirely possible. Perhaps the total is even more. I have noted announcement after announcement in the press, on television and on the radio since the Secretary of State took up his responsibilities.

The Secretary of State recently made a trip to the United States of America. I welcome the fact that he is learning from businesses there; they have things to teach us. However, I hope that he will not ignore successes at home. Far from wishing to talk down British business, I spend much of my time talking it up, to counter the awful words of the Secretary of State. He blames everyone but the Government for what is going wrong in fine, productive, successful companies that are in deep trouble because of the Government's policies.

The Secretary of State claims to have had a flash of inspiration and light, to the effect that clusters work. If lots of large and small investors can be placed side by side, he claims, that will generate more jobs, more companies and more success. I wonder whether he has ever thought about the fact that, just a few miles from here, a little east of Westminster, is one of the oldest and most successful clusters of business in the world. It is called the City of London. The City of London was a successful cluster of inward investors and home-grown businesses before Columbus even sailed to America. But what does the Secretary of State do? He does not go to the City of London to congratulate it and see what he can do to help it; he, with his colleagues in Brussels, threatens it with a withholding tax and with dire consequences if it does not follow his political agenda. He will have to learn that even great success stories such as the City of London need care and attention from Ministers when economies are in troubled times.

Does the Secretary of State ever pause to think that Hatton garden and Harley street are also examples of successful clusters developed by the United Kingdom a long time ago? He is right to think that Silicon valley in the United States of America is a great success story, but is he aware that, if he travelled 40 miles to the west of London, he would be in the heart of a great British success story—another silicon valley called the Thames valley? He may not want to come to my constituency, where there is an enormous amount of enterprise and where unemployment is 0.9 per cent., but he may like to go to the constituencies of his hon. Friends the Members for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) and for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), where he will see great success. Why does he not go there and learn from those experiences? Why does he not then take an interest in Hartlepool, where unemployment is 10 per cent. and where male unemployment is 13.5 per cent., and why can he not apply some of the success stories from the Thames valley to Hartlepool, which is what I would want him to do if I were one of his constituents?

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will agree with me on the right hon. Gentleman's record on clusters. I am pleased that he acknowledges that clusters are vital to our economy, but, having admitted that, will he reflect on the Conservative Government's performance after 1992? I offer some statistics. In 1992, under the Tory Administration, 62,767 businesses failed—such a glowing acknowledgement then of clusters and their effectiveness in the economy. In 1993, there was a rapid improvement, with 55,000 failures. Why do we not go to the year before the Conservative Government were unceremoniously ousted, when their glorious achievement in recognition of the significance of clusters throughout the nation resulted in only 36,000 business losses?

Madam Speaker: Order. I hope to call the hon. Lady during the debate.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Lady has probably made her speech already; she clearly has not been listening, because I dealt at the beginning of the debate with the point that she has rather tardily made.

The truth is that the Government have transformed the United Kingdom from being the number one place for new investment for multinational companies to the number one place for closures. Now that there are some problems in the world economy, where do such companies turn to to dismiss their staff and close their factories first but the United Kingdom, because they know that it is in the United Kingdom that the climate has deteriorated most dramatically.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The right hon. Gentleman refers to investment, but he must be well aware from the figures shown, for example, in the McKinsey studies for the Treasury that, because for 18 years the Conservative Government failed to invest at the rate of our competitors, we are now in a situation where the Germans invest 67 per cent. more per worker than we do, the Americans invest 52 per cent. more, the Japanese 55 per cent. more and the French 46 per cent. more. Moreover, it is a little rich of him to talk about clusters when he was part of a Government who, in one fell swoop, put 32,000 miners on the dole.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has not realised that the McKinsey report is based on entirely arbitrary exchange rates—purchasing power parity rates—considerably below recent market exchange rates. That is why it shows output per head in the United Kingdom as lower than output per head in west Germany. Incidentally, it compares us not with the whole of Germany, just with west Germany. Were we to make the comparison at recent high market exchange rates, we would have a very different picture of Britain's relative success.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Johnson and Johnson, which makes orthopaedic parts, is closing its plant in my constituency and moving to Cork. It is doing so not because it is unwilling to invest—it will invest a great deal in Cork—but because the Government have made the climate for investment so hostile.

Mr. Redwood: That is another good example of the point that I am making. The danger—indeed, the reality—is that investment intentions will be transferred from the UK, which is now regarded as a hostile climate for investment, to countries such as Ireland and Germany, also within the EU. Although costs in those countries used to be much higher, the relative advantage is now rather different because the Labour Government have made it so dear to make things in Britain.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) has clearly read not the original McKinsey report but only a briefing supplied to him by the Labour party. Had he read the report, he would have seen that it makes it clear that we should compare ourselves with America, and that our economy and that of Europe generally are becoming increasingly less competitive because of over-regulation of the type imposed by the Labour Government on British industry.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. The exchange rate differential is less important in the case of America because McKinsey believes that its rate is closer to the true rate and because, in recent months under this Administration, it has not been as high, relatively, as the Deutschmark rate. Thus there is a technical as well as a sound reason, based on the relative performance of economies. I agree with my hon. Friend that labour productivity in this country is not as high as it is in the US. Later in my speech, I shall discuss what the Government should do about that.

The House may like to remember what some large overseas investors were saying about this country just a little while ago when they decided to set up business here. For example, when Siemens decided to build an important plant in Britain in 1995—quite recently—it said:

> "Our decision to build the new semiconductor plant here in the UK is a recognition of the pro-business environment which exists and the skills and commitment of the British workforce. . . . we have not invested here because we see the UK as a low-wage economy."

Siemens recently decided to close that plant because none of those conditions remains true, as the Government have decided to make it too dear to make things in Britain. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not true."] Hon. Members say that that it is not true. What other explanation is there? Siemens has not closed its factories elsewhere in the world, but it has decided to close the British factory, despite the fact that, a short while ago, it felt that Britain was the best place to invest.

If business taxes are increased by £25 billion and business regulation is increased by £14 billion over the lifetime of this Parliament, Britain will become very uncompetitive. The productivity problem is not of industry's making; it is of the Government's making. It is they who are bleeding industry dry by taking money out of its tills and coffers and putting it into the Treasury or administration.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): Would the right hon. Gentleman care to quote Siemens's reasons for closing its factory as carefully as he quoted its reasons for coming here in the first place? As I recall, it spoke about the worldwide recession and the collapse in its market. Is it not easy to see why it would choose to make

redundancies here? One legacy that the previous Government left this country is that it is now much easier to sack people here than it is in other countries.

Mr. Redwood: Of course there are problems in the microprocessor market worldwide. We have always accepted that. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady has not been listening. I have always said that on the Siemens issue. The question that I have always posed is why, given that there are problems, Siemens closed the British factory and not the others. Why has it chosen to close a modern, state-of-the-art factory, having made such a huge investment in Britain so recently, and why has it changed its view of Britain dramatically since 1995? Rather than close factories in Portugal or Germany, it chose to close the most modern plant—in Britain—because it had become too costly.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The right hon. Gentleman cannot get away with this. The Siemens management, from the chairman and chief executive downwards, have made it consistently clear in all public statements and all discussions with me that the closure of the plant on north Tyneside had nothing whatever to do with domestic economic considerations. The reason that they cited was the collapse of the world market in semiconductor products. If the right hon. Gentleman is to be taken seriously in the rest of this debate, he would do well to withdraw his ridiculous claim.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State must explain why Siemens closed in Britain and not elsewhere. That is the important question.

Mr. Mandelson: What is more, the right hon. Gentleman should be aware that that was not the only plant that Siemens closed. It even closed down lines in those products in its home city, Munich, as well as elsewhere. He needs to think again and get his facts right.

Mr. Redwood: Britain was the place where Siemens chose to close a complete factory of a most modern kind because the numbers no longer looked nearly as good as they did in 1995, when it was praising the United Kingdom and the policies being followed.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that things are rather more complicated than he suggests, and that currents of investment between Europe and the United Kingdom go each way? Leyland Trucks, in my constituency, will next year produce an extra 4,500 trucks—which means more than 300 jobs—as a result of a transfer of production from Holland and Belgium. That current is going in the opposite direction to that suggested by the shadow Secretary of State. Perhaps he will accept that things are a little bit more complicated than the black and white picture that he paints.

Mr. Redwood: I am not arguing that all the industry will close, but a significant number of factories will close because the Government have made it so much more difficult for business to survive. Of course, there will be some success stories—we shall welcome every one, because they are good news—but they are a drop in the ocean compared with the massive attrition that is going on in manufacturing.

I remind the Secretary of State of the case of Rover. In 1994, when BMW purchased it, Rover was working at full capacity. A BMW spokesman said:

> "Plants at Rover are operating at the limits of capacity, and in some instances special shifts were worked."

In 1995—as late as October—the chairman of BMW said:

> "Great Britain is currently the most attractive country among all European locations for producing cars. This results from the structural reforms initiated by Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980s, the most significant factor being the rearrangement of industrial relations between companies and trade unions".

That was said by the company that is now talking about the possible closure of all or most of Longbridge, which is one of our most important car plants.

It is obvious that something has gone horribly wrong. In respect of the particular factor singled out by the chairman of BMW, we know that the Government are about to throw a spanner in the works of our successful industrial relations reform, but we also know that Rover has moved from reasonable profits to heavy losses and has had to issue a warning that it will not be making profits for the rest of this century.

Why is Rover making those losses? The reason is quite obvious. Rover has some good cars—they are not the problem, and the Secretary of State will share our pride in the marvellous new models that it launched at the motor show that he and I visited. The problem is the numbers: the high tax bill, the exchange rate and the high regulatory cost are wrecking the numbers at Rover.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware of the price fixing that is taking place in this country? Surely there would be many more benefits to Rover if that were taken away, because it would be able to sell cars much more easily, and surely he must be blaming BMW management in what he is saying.

Mr. Redwood: I look forward to the Secretary of State's answer to that question, and I should like from him replies to a series of questions that I sent him yesterday in the hope that he would get advice and give us the answers in the House today.

I asked the Secretary of State a series of questions about how he intended to respond to the detail of the McKinsey report. Although I disagree with the McKinsey methodology, the report concludes that the reason for the apparent or actual productivity shortfall that it identifies is, largely, Government policy. McKinsey says that it is a series of mistaken restrictions imposed by Brussels and London Governments on various product markets.

I hope that the Secretary of State will answer my questions, building on the point made by the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) about the car market. Is it correct that the right hon. Gentleman is to lift all restrictions on car imports into the United Kingdom? Why did he not know about that last week, when it was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer? The Secretary of State seemed to be completely unaware of the policy, although it should fall in his bailiwick.

Is it correct that the Government think that we have insufficient milk quota from Brussels, and what will they do about it? Would we not have a much more successful

[Mr. Redwood]

dairy industry if we had more milk quota here in the United Kingdom, so that we had more raw milk to process in this country for higher value-added uses by the food industry? Will the Secretary of State and his colleagues fight in Brussels to get us the milk quota that we need to deal with the problems identified in the McKinsey report?

Will the Secretary of State and his right hon. Friends remove the restrictions on the building of large out-of-town retail developments? The McKinsey report says that that is the main reason why our productivity in food and non-food retailing is lower than that of the United States of America, where out-of-town hypermarkets with large, free car parks are common. How does that square with the Government's much-vaunted policy of restricting out-of-town developments—the very policy that McKinsey says lies at the heart of the productivity difficulty?

Do the Government intend to remove the restriction on building new hotels? That policy is based on arguments similar to those used about hypermarkets, and is also identified in the McKinsey report as the main reason why hotel productivity is lower than in the United States of America.

Does the Secretary of State, as the ultimate regulator of our telephone system, intend to switch our system to that used in America, where local calls are free or very cheap, but where it is more expensive to get access to a phone? I thought that that was against the whole thrust of Labour's policy of opening up access to a phone. The McKinsey report says that, without such a system, our productivity in telephones will never match that of the United States of America.

Does the Secretary of State intend to remove planning restrictions on high-tech developments? The McKinsey reports says that we do not have bigger and better high-tech clusters, like Silicon valley in the United States, because of planning restrictions.

Will the right hon. Gentleman lift the restriction on the licensing of pharmacies, because McKinsey says that the main constraint on higher pharmacy productivity is the restriction on the number, size and type of development?

Will the right hon. Gentleman lift the wholesale exclusive distribution franchise arrangements in the automotive industry? Of course, car prices could be lower if there were car hypermarkets without franchises, but does he think that this is the right time to make that change, given that all manufacturers in the United Kingdom are struggling for profits because of the terrible problem of costs that they face as a result of the Government's policy?

Will the right hon. Gentleman give us more detail on the competition policy that he wants to follow in other sectors? Let us take the newspaper industry. The right hon. Gentleman said that the Competition Act 1998 will provide a more competitive system. Does that mean that he will get rid of the recommended cover price for newspapers? Will he abolish all protected price systems in the newspaper industry? Will he open up distribution to anyone who wants to distribute, thus breaking the current exclusive distribution arrangements?

Those are serious questions, and I gave the Secretary of State full notice of them so that he could prepare serious answers. We shall give him scope to answer, even though he has not yet published his competitiveness White Paper. Many of the answers have been leaked or have already been given to the country: many of them were supplied by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the green Budget papers. I hope that the Secretary of State has now read them, and has caught up with what the Chancellor has already announced.

This is the day when we need to know. British industry needs to know and will read the Secretary of State's words. Those in motor manufacturing who are struggling to make a profit or avoid a loss need to know whether their prices will be cut soon or immediately and, if so, by how much, and which of these arrangements the right hon. Gentleman intends to change. Those struggling to make a living in the food manufacturing industry would like a Secretary of State for Trade and Industry or a Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who will fight for them in Brussels and get more, desperately needed quota.

The whole nation will be fascinated to know how far the right hon. Gentleman intends to go on the licensing of large, out-of-town superstores and different types of big hotel. I suspect that he will get into trouble with his colleagues in the Government if he backs that aspect of the McKinsey report.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a difference in infrastructure, design, work and social patterns as between the American and the British way of life? They are totally different. Is he suggesting that we should adopt the American system for our way of life by supporting the McKinsey recommendations? Many of us disagree with McKinsey.

Mr. Redwood: I have much sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's view. I favour the British way of life, as hon. Members may know. There are obvious differences between the United States of America—a country which I admire greatly—and the United Kingdom, which has a long history and a much smaller geographical area. Some planning policies that may work in the USA would be offensive in the UK. The Secretary of State will walk all over that difficult balance if he tries both to defend McKinsey and to say that he will not implement quite a few of the report's important recommendations.

I should be very happy to give the Opposition's view on all these matters, but I think that I should hear the Government's view first. I have made it clear in my exchanges with the Secretary of State that I fully support the demand for more milk quota from Brussels. That would be a welcome removal of an important block on the food industry. I would want to hear more about the impact on the motor manufacturing industry if precipitate action were to be taken, because I am conscious of the great weakness of that industry at the moment, although I like the idea of a better deal for customers. I hope that the Secretary of State will have something useful to say about the balance of those problems, given that I trust that he, like me, wants a strong motor manufacturing industry, as well as strong distribution.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the topic of agriculture and food, will he tell me whether he agrees that the Government's agriculture policy has been a major contributor to the

downturn of the agriculture engineering industry, and to the current failures in the agricultural business industry? The effects of the Government's bad policies are not restricted to one part of manufacturing.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend is correct, but I must not stray too far from the DTI brief. I raised the subject of milk quotas because I assumed that the Secretary of State was still technically responsible for the productivity agenda, and, to some extent, for the food manufacturing industry. The recommendation that I mentioned is an important part of the McKinsey report, which in other contexts the right hon. Gentleman praises considerably.

The Secretary of State must tell us what he will do about the textile industry. Is he aware that Marks and Spencer is about to decide to obtain many fewer of its products from the United Kingdom? Has he seen the predictions of trade unions, and of other independent forecasting bodies, that at least 60,000 jobs will go? Is he aware of the dangers facing the motor car industry? When he was having discussions with the management at Rover and trying to blame the work force, did he appreciate that there was a serious threat to jobs at Rover, and that production could be moved outside the country unless he and his colleagues did something about the current situation?

Will the Secretary of State take advantage of today's debate to put the Post Office out of its misery, and tell us whether he will let it expand abroad? How will he square the difficulties with Treasury rules, if he is now ruling out a privatisation—which we would be happy to support, if it would be of any assistance to him?

The Secretary of State and his colleagues are in a fix. They know that everything that they are doing in regard to working time, the minimum wage and the social chapter is deeply regulatory, and is imposing more and more cost burdens on British business. Because they do not wish to admit that, they are trying to close down the whole subject of manufacturing, to tell people that it does not matter, and to suggest that the creation of more jobs in supermarkets is a fair exchange for the factory closures and job losses that they are now recording.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to explain to the House why his Government left a legacy allowing only one region in the country to achieve gross domestic product per head that was at or above the average achieved by European regions? Will he also explain why he opposes the establishment of regional development agencies whose remit is to work with the private sector to invest in manufacturing and other industry, paying heed to local sensitivities and opportunities?

Mr. Redwood: I seem to remember that we left this country in extremely robust economic health. If the hon. Lady cared to look at the comparisons in regard to recent exchange rates, she would see that we are a relatively rich country, in the world and within Europe. She and her right hon. and hon. Friends would discover that if they examined the euro scheme in a little more detail—a scheme that would entail our paying higher taxes to send massive transfers to the 100 million or more people elsewhere in euro-land who are not nearly as well off as the average person in this country.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): While we are talking about the euro, which has many implications for manufacturing, will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to agree with Michael Portillo, who says that the Conservative party should rule out joining the euro for ever?

Mr. Redwood: I entirely agree with the leader of the Conservative party, who has made a series of superb speeches about the euro, saying that it is far too hazardous a project for this or the next Parliament, and who will lead our strong opposition to this dangerous notion. The hon. Gentleman is rather inexpert at tempting people further; he will have to learn a little more about the ways of the House.

The true plight of British manufacturing is made much worse by a Government who meddle, send bills, interfere and cost far too much. I have here a small selection of the documents that a business man must read before he is even allowed to practise in this country: "Insurance Contributions", "Statutory Sick Pay", "Statutory Maternity Pay", "The Rules Governing Cars", "Manual for Employers on National Insurance", "Small Firms Employing Staff" and "Employers' Further Guide to PAYE and NICs". A small business man would have to read, understand and comply with all that before being allowed to trade. On top of that, and I freely concede that we left quite a lot of burdens on business at the end of our period of government, we have £14 billion more in regulatory costs as a direct result of this Government's actions.

If the Secretary of State wants to know why British industry is suffering, he should just look around him and see what the Government are doing. If he wants to know where the true productivity problem is in Britain, it is in the Government. If he wants to know why British companies are dipping into loss and experiencing very hard times, it is because of the tax bill, the regulation bill, the interest rate bill and the sterling bill with which the Government have saddled them.

British manufacturing needs a break from this Government's wild ideas. It needs a lower cost base. The Government can deliver the lower cost base if they wish to. The fact that they do not wish to shows that they do not care about all those job losses already recorded and are going to do nothing to stop job losses to come.

The Government should heed the advice of the trade unions, which say that several hundred thousand manufacturing jobs are going to go. They should heed the business surveys that show confidence at a new low for this decade. They should heed the advice of all those business people who say that they cannot make things and sell them at a profit from a British base. They should heed the advice of all those foreign companies which, two or three years ago, thought that Britain was the best place in which to do business but which are now closing here first as world economic conditions deteriorate.

The Chancellor may live in fantasy forecast land and the Secretary of State may rather spend time in Rio than in Hartlepool, but we want some answers. We want to know what the Secretary of State will do, how he will respond to the McKinsey productivity challenge and how any of that would make it easier for British business.

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Mandelson): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"recognises that the last thing business wants is a return to the boom and bust policies of the past, with interest rates of 15 per cent., inflation above 10 per cent. and a budget deficit averaging £41 billion a year from 1992 to 1996; welcomes the Government's decisive action in taking politics out of interest rate decisions, a move which the Opposition clearly does not support; notes that employment is currently 400,000 higher than it was when the Government came into office, and that long-term interest rates are at their lowest for 35 years; welcomes the measures that the Government has taken to encourage enterprise, investment and innovation, and to help unemployed people into jobs; welcomes the McKinsey Report as an important contribution to the productivity debate and notes that, unlike its predecessor, this Government acted to increase competitive conditions through a new Competition Act; and condemns the Opposition for its own record in government, when manufacturing employment declined by 2¼ million and Britain went into deficit on manufacturing trade for the first time ever in peacetime."

Despite the fine words of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), the Opposition have not chosen their timing well for this debate. It follows the announcement of the decision of the Bank of England to reduce interest rates further by 0.5 per cent., which was welcome news for British business, including those in manufacturing—a decision that came too late for the Opposition to decide on a different topic for their Opposition day today. It comes the day after BP announced the creation of thousands of jobs—however hard the right hon. Gentleman tries to discount those jobs—with its investment in Scotland and in Humberside, and it comes on the day when the Confederation of British Industry president, Sir Clive Thompson, buried—or should I say filled in—the Conservatives' so-called black hole in the public finances.

As we all know, Sir Clive is a first-rate business man and an excellent CBI chief, but he is not especially well known for his pro-Labour sympathies, so let me quote him in full:

"I do not believe we have a government that is slack on public spending or cavalier with our money, whatever Francis Maude may claim about black holes."

Despite that discouragement from his erstwhile friends, the right hon. Gentleman is not to be held back in his mission to spread doom and disinformation about the economy. His speech contained more negatives than a photographer's studio. In his world, there are grey skies just around the corner, and every silver lining has a cloud. One almost expects his dispirited colleagues on the Back Benches to start swaying from side to side before breaking into a rendition of "Always Look On The Dark Side Of Life."

Why are we being treated to all this pessimism and alarmism? Presumably the answer lies in a carefully researched electoral strategy by Conservative central office, as it is only if the British people were to feel complete despair, utter self-loathing and a total loss of self-respect that they might start to identify with the Conservative party again.

Lest I be accused of being unfair, I must recognise that there are some industries which are promoted by the Opposition. The manufacturers of myth, the peddlers of half-truth and the merchants of doom will all find a good market for their goods in Smith square.

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted that the Secretary of State has given way. He is obviously enjoying himself, but he is replying to a speech that I did not deliver. Will he recognise that, in my speech, I was full of praise for many manufacturing and industrial achievements in this country? However, it is time that the Government were held to account for their many mistakes, which have made things worse. Will the right hon. Gentleman now answer my points?

Mr. Mandelson: As Sir Clive Thompson might say, "When you're in a hole, stop digging".

The right hon. Member for Wokingham dwelt on the McKinsey report, and I want to deal with that straight away. The report is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the national debate on productivity, and I agree with much of its thrust. However, let us be clear about the thrust of the report, which is that our productivity, relative to that of our main competitors, did not improve during the Tory years, and that that remains a serious challenge for the whole country.

The right hon. Gentleman does not accept that. He rejects the findings of the McKinsey report, and wants to pretend that there is no such challenge for British business and the British economy. He does not even accept that a productivity problem exists. In his speech to the CBI last week, he referred to McKinsey's findings as a stream of "fiddled figures". If there is no productivity problem, how else does he explain the fact that our national income per head is still lower than those of the United States, Germany and France, much as it was 25 years ago?

The fundamental point to emerge from the McKinsey report is the paramount importance of competition. On that score, the Government have already taken major and decisive action by introducing the Competition Act 1998. That is a belated and much-needed piece of legislation, which the previous Administration failed to deliver and which the right hon. Gentleman refused to have anything to do with when he was in the Department of Trade and Industry. So much for the right hon. Gentleman's clarion call for more competition and greater competitiveness. When he had the opportunity to act, he did absolutely nothing; he did not lift a finger.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Mandelson: I will come to the hon. Gentleman later. I want to save him up. It would be wrong to squander him too early in the debate.

I do not want to dwell on the McKinsey analysis. However, all the important questions raised in the long letter that I received from the right hon. Member for Wokingham—milk quotas, new hotels and price systems in the newspaper industry—will receive an answer from me in writing in due course.

Mr. Gill: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Mandelson: I will give way presently.

As the right hon. Member for Wokingham demanded of me, I want to address seriously what I think are the basic issues for debate today. I want to discuss what is happening to the global economy—the real world, if Opposition Members can remember what that is—and what we are doing to help British businesses and individuals throughout the economy, not just in manufacturing, in what we recognise are difficult times. Also, I want to lift our sights a little and look beyond the immediate questions to the future and the challenges facing the British economy.

Mr. Bermingham: I hope that my right hon. Friend understands my question far better than the right hon. Member for Wokingham understood my intervention during his speech. The right hon. Gentleman clearly did not understand a word of what I was saying. All I was saying—perhaps the Secretary of State agrees—is that the McKinsey report must be read in the context of our infrastructure and our social patterns. If it is read in that context, our competition policy a propos hotels and so on will be built to the way in which we work as a nation. I assume that that is what the Government intend to do.

Mr. Mandelson: I did not read any argument or analysis in McKinsey contradicting my hon. Friend's comments. Moreover, I did not read any argument in McKinsey on social standards or on the way in which the United Kingdom—in many respects, fortunately, unlike the United States—seeks to combine competitiveness and fairness in a modern economy. That is what McKinsey is all about, and that is what we shall be pursuing.

Mr. Gill *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mandelson: I give way to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill).

Mr. Gill: Before the Secretary of State takes us on a tour d'horizon of events in the rest of the world, may I bring him back home—to what is happening in this country? Does he realise that what matters in competitiveness is the unit cost of producing a product, and that there are many components to that cost—not only the factor that he has already mentioned, productivity, but also overheads?

The one factor that is within the Government's gift—that it is within their power to do something about—is the one that we call "overheads". Last week, the House debated the working time directive regulations, which, over a full year, will add £2.3 billion to costs to industry. The Government now propose to lift the cap on compensation in industrial tribunals. May I put to the right hon. Gentleman the not-so-hypothetical case of a west midlands engineering company—possibly employing 50 people, and possibly with a turnover of about £3 million—that, if it had an award against—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should probably now come fairly quickly to his question.

Mr. Gill: Does the Secretary of State realise that the consequence of proposals now in train could be that half the profit of many typical companies could go in just one award in one industrial tribunal case? Is that the way to encourage British industry?

Mr. Mandelson: I was impressed by the hon. Gentleman's diatribe against the working time directive—although I have not heard Opposition Front Benchers state that they will ensure that the United Kingdom does not have statutory three-week per year holidays for every employee. I do not know whether that is the Opposition's policy. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman's diatribe might have been delivered more appropriately during the time of the previous, Conservative Government. They signed up to the working time directive, not us. We are simply implementing something that the previous Government agreed to.

Mr. Bercow: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way at last. Given his unwise invocation—in his own support—of the comments of the president of the Confederation of British Industry, has he noticed that, as recently as 3 November, the CBI president said that, since Labour took power, the business horizon had darkened because of the "creeping paralysis" of regulation introduced by the Government? The president added that, unless Ministers did something to stop and reverse that trend, the only growth industry in Britain—with the right hon. Gentleman as Secretary of State—would be regulation. Is the right hon. Gentleman proud of that record?

Mr. Mandelson: Sir Clive and many others would have been recalling that, although the previous Administration did indeed repeal 3,000 such regulations—on which I congratulate them—they introduced 10,000 more. Such a record does not allow the hon. Gentleman to give any lectures on business regulation. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I should like now to deal with the real world and events in the global economy. Those events are serious, affect us all and have to inform this debate.

As the right hon. Member for Wokingham barely recognised in his remarks—coming as they did from his own rather extra-planetary world—all is not well in the global economy. Asia caught a very serious bout of flu, with repercussions reverberating around the world. No one is immune to the contagion. A quarter of the world is now in recession, which is a fact of life with which we have to live.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, although it is predicted that there will be a 7 per cent. growth year on year in world manufacturing export markets over the next four years, it is also predicted that our exports will increase by only 4 per cent? Markets are growing, but we are not taking advantage of them.

Mr. Mandelson: That is exactly the point that I made at the outset, and I shall return to it later. The markets are there—what we need is the competitiveness to make sure that our share of those world markets is keeping up, and, indeed, expanding. That is exactly what our policies are focused on.

[Mr. Mandelson]

No one disputes the fact that there is a very serious downturn in the world economy. There will be inevitable job losses as a result. The question is how much Britain will suffer. Can we withstand the worst?

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I support my right hon. Friend's rational and robust defence of the Government's policies. I know that his Department aims to help British manufacturing, but yesterday, because of the conditions that he is outlining, major redundancies were announced in my constituency by Umbro, the sports manufacturer.

I wonder how my right hon. Friend and his Department might assist my constituents who are to lose their jobs. I hope that he will accept the memorandum that I have sent to him, which deals with why my constituency should retain assisted area status. Finally, I remind him of my invitation to him to visit Deeside, and specifically the European Airbus factory, which is a great success.

Mr. Mandelson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that such a visit will be possible before long. As he will realise, I am extremely concerned about the effect of the decision to which he refers on the employees and their families. I shall deal a little later with the action that the Government are taking to help precisely the individuals and localities that are being hit. As for the assisted area map, my hon. Friend will know that we are currently reviewing it. We have consulted many local authorities, and will consult Members of Parliament. My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry will be doing that.

I was talking about the world recession. No one disputes the fact that there is a serious downturn and that there will be job losses. The question is how much we will suffer from it.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Mandelson: No.

It is important to understand the weaknesses in the domestic economy—weaknesses that we inherited, and with which the world downturn is making it more complicated to deal. The fact is that we needed to slow down the economy because it was in danger of overheating. It was expanding at an unsustainable rate. Everyone knows that we could not carry on like that if we wanted a platform of economic stability on which we could build sustainable jobs and wealth.

If people are in any doubt about that, they have only to remember where Tory policies landed us in the early 1990s. Of course, the right hon. Member for Wokingham does not like to be reminded of that. He is currently in denial mode, disowning the Tories' record in government as he continues to nurse his rather lukewarm leadership ambitions.

Let us go back to the early 1990s. Before then, the Tory Government had cheerfully and irresponsibly let go of the reins, sidestepping necessary decisions on interest rates, public spending and taxation. We all know the result—an unsustainable boom—but only the Tories have failed to learn the lesson.

The Tories then had to slam on the brakes, plunging the economy into recession. Interest rates jumped to 15 per cent., business cash balances were drained, and many businesses went to the wall. Manufacturing output collapsed, and, in total, 1.8 million jobs were lost. In other words, we went from boom to bust as a result of the policies pursued by the very people who now have the audacity to lecture us about our management of the British economy.

We cannot afford to make such mistakes again. That is why since coming to office we have taken decisive action to get inflation under control, to reduce Government borrowing and to put the public finances on a sound footing, and that is why we are now in a strong position to withstand the worst of this difficult time in the world economy.

No one can be sure that we have seen the end of the crisis in Asia and elsewhere, but the best judgment that the Government can make is that we can and will avoid recession in the United Kingdom.

I have no doubt that the Opposition will find that very disappointing because they are never known to put national interest above party interest. They are absolutely crying out for recession. It is clear from their every utterance that they pray for it, they revel in it and they see it as their only route to political salvation. They care not a jot about the consequences for people's work and people's jobs. It is all propaganda to them.

Thankfully, independent economic forecasters do not wish to play that game. Almost all forecasts show modest growth next year. The International Monetary Fund forecast is close to that of the pre-Budget report. *[Interruption.]* It is an important matter. I suggest that Opposition Members listen to the economic argument that I am making, as I might be able to tell them something that they did not know or refused to acknowledge.

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) *rose—*

Mr. Mandelson: I shall give way in a moment.

I know that no politician should place excessive weight on one set of economic forecasts, but equally I am determined that the Tories' wilful pessimism on the economy should not translate into wish fulfilment in its implications for the rest of us and for the British economy.

We should be giving British businesses the benefit of the best and most informed judgment that we can make. We should be talking up the efforts of British businesses and giving them support to ride out the storm, not making the waves rise higher and fall even harder as the Opposition are doing, wantonly and irresponsibly. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will correct the impression that his right hon. Friend gave.

Mr. Hayes: Rather than this diatribe, would not the right hon. Gentleman do better to emulate the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who a few days ago addressed the House in a mood of contrition and humility? Would not a degree of humility and contrition go some way towards satisfying people who have lost their jobs in

Alyn and Deeside and elsewhere that the Government do indeed care about them? If the Secretary of State must have an iron fist, he should at least use a velvet glove.

Mr. Mandelson: The hon. Gentleman, in speaking about humility and contrition, might address the record of the previous Government and the loss of 1.8 million jobs in the British economy as a result of their policies. As for what we are doing about it, I am trying to explain that.

To the extent that it is possible to make any sense of the analysis by the right hon. Member for Wokingham this afternoon—if his outpouring of false assertion, contradiction and lack of logic could be dignified by such a word—and in his previous speeches and statements, all of which I have taken seriously and read carefully, including his article in *The Times* today, he was trying to make two arguments.

The right hon. Gentleman argued first that the Government's public spending policy is keeping interest rates high, and, secondly, that our policies on taxes and social costs have worsened the business environment—we heard a little more about that this afternoon. He is wrong on both counts.

First, let me deal with public spending. I was glad to hear the right hon. Gentleman give the Government credit for sticking to our predecessors' spending limits for the first two years. However, generous acknowledgement of our prudence is rather difficult to square with his simultaneous charge that our new three-year spending plans explain why interest rates have risen under Labour. I find that difficult to follow.

One has only to look at the connection that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to make between interest rates and what he calls our extravagant investment in the health service and education and our extravagant expenditure to help children in need and pensioners. Without exception, all the increases in interest rates that the Bank has announced took place well before the Chancellor's announcement in the summer. So what is the connection? Where is the link between our spending plans and the increases in interest rates, which, as the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, are now coming down?

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State will have to try to read a little better than that. I made it clear in my article that the extent to which the Government deviated from our plans in their first two years in office was damaging. For example, welfare to work, which we opposed, was an expensive, failed programme, and was one of the reasons why expenditure was higher than under the Conservatives. The Bank explicitly mentioned in its recent comments on the economy both the minimum wage, which was known to be coming in from the early days of the Government, and the expenditure plans. Will the Secretary of State now read those minutes, and understand their influence on the Bank of England?

Mr. Mandelson: I have read the minutes, I have talked to the Governor of the Bank of England, and I have met members of the Monetary Policy Committee; and not one of them has once criticised the Government's setting of the national minimum wage. They have made no argument at all that it will have the adverse impact that the right hon. Gentleman describes. However, he has not told me in his intervention about the connection that he claims between the level of interest rates and our public spending plans.

Nor is it clear to me what alternative interest rate policy the right hon. Gentleman believes Britain should have followed. Would he have interest rates lower and take risks with inflation? Is that his policy? Is he saying that we should keep interest rates down to keep the exchange rate down? That was Nigel Lawson's policy in the late 1980s. Does he want a re-run of that? I really do not think so.

The right hon. Gentleman's second line of argument is that the Government's policies are worsening the business environment in the United Kingdom. He quotes a very big number for the increases in business taxes. I have looked carefully at that figure. I take very seriously any claim that we are unreasonably and inappropriately increasing the burden on British business and increasing costs unnecessarily, so I looked very carefully at how he reached such a gargantuan figure. I discovered that he mixed together the windfall tax, which was one off and restricted to the privatised utilities, with various other measures which either affect pension funds rather than companies or are measures to tackle tax avoidance, which I assume he would not wish to condone.

In fact, under the Labour Government, British business enjoys one of the most favourable tax regimes in the European Union. We have lowered corporation tax from 33 to 30 per cent. from April next year, and small business taxation from 23 to 20 per cent. That compares with tax rates of 41.6 per cent. in France, 37 per cent. in Italy and 35 per cent. in Spain. So the right hon. Gentleman's charge falls.

Our action on corporate tax rates and small firms' allowances will reduce companies' tax bills by about £4.5 billion over the lifetime of this Parliament. We have introduced a long-term capital gains tax rate of 10p in the pound. All those measures, without exception, have been welcomed by business, because the reality is that new Labour means low business taxes—and long may that remain so.

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): The Secretary of State mentioned small businesses. I hear what he is saying about regulation. Would he be prepared to commit the Government to producing an annual report assessing the impact of regulation on small businesses? That would enable us to see whether what he says is true.

Mr. Mandelson: I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously. I am glad to say that the Government's better regulation task force is about to embark on a close examination of the impact of regulation on small and medium enterprises—and not before time.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham misunderstands the thrust of the Government's policy on the application of social policy to business. It is to combine flexibility with decency. I am sorry that that is an alien concept to him. All seriously concerned and committed business people in this country support the idea.

The right hon. Gentleman ignored the offsetting benefits of the working time directive, which include higher productivity, reduced absenteeism and improved employment relations. What is more, it was agreed under the Tories. Would they campaign in Brussels—not that it would do them any good—for the repeal of the statutory

[Mr. Mandelson]

three weeks holiday a year for people in work in this country? Is that the policy of the Conservatives? Their silence is very telling.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Mandelson: No, I am sorry. I want the official line from the official Conservative spokesman, not the provisional wing of the Conservative party.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Mandelson: And here it is.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State should remember that we asked for a debate on the issue. Unfortunately, he was obviously not interested enough to listen to what I said. I set out our position at great length, and produced a number of helpful suggestions to make it cheaper for businesses to implement the directive. Our criticism was directed particularly at the massive administrative cost. We do not think that it will help people on low incomes as much as it will create a massive bureaucracy. That is what the right hon. Gentleman should be addressing. I am sorry that he did not bother to read my remarks.

Mr. Mandelson: The right hon. Gentleman asked for a debate, and he got it. I want an answer to my question: would he repeal the directive? Does he believe that it would be right to deny people in this country a statutory three-week holiday a year? Is that so wrong? Is that so unacceptable?

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Mandelson: No, I am sorry. I want the official Conservative party policy.

The welfare-to-work programme, which the Conservatives also attack, makes the labour market more flexible. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should just listen for a moment, and I shall explain. It creates greater flexibility by breaking down the barriers that trap people in long-term unemployment. It increases the supply of labour in the economy, its quality and its employability. That is the point of the new deal and other welfare-to-work measures. I am very sorry that the Conservatives are so short-sighted and narrow-minded that they cannot understand that our measures are helpful to flexibility and employability, and therefore helpful to the competitiveness and success of the British economy.

Mr. Brady: I am fascinated by the right hon. Gentleman's rather odd definition of flexibility. Which European economy does he consider to have the most flexible labour market?

Mr. Mandelson: Britain compares with the best in the European Union. Indeed, we exceed the flexibility of many other member states. We are determined to protect that, and build on it. The Conservatives refuse to accept that flexibility can be combined with decency and minimum standards for working people.

The Government's actions are designed to steer a stable course through the world's turbulence, and to offset the immediate repercussions. I have already said that I am saddened by any job loss, every family hit by unemployment, and every locality hit by closure. That is why we have taken steps to reduce the hurt, not by bailing out firms—of course not—but by providing training and employment opportunities for those affected by closures; by working with the companies concerned, such as Fujitsu and Siemens, to try to save jobs by finding new owners for the plants; and by targeting the areas most in need through the single regeneration budget, European funds and assistance to companies.

The Government have introduced a package of measures to provide immediate help for those affected by major redundancies. It includes rapid response teams to provide counselling, careers guidance and advice on retraining opportunities.

For example, in response to the closure in September of the Fujitsu plant near my town in County Durham, the Government are providing £625,000 from the rapid response fund for additional training resources. Already, 123 people have found new jobs, and 377 are engaged in training. That is action that could be expected of a Labour Government in the face of an economic downturn. We shall strengthen our programme of measures in the coming months wherever necessary.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Siemens and Fujitsu received considerable grant assistance for setting up. Will some of that be repaid to go towards the retraining costs, the redundancy costs and all the costs involved in encouraging people and helping them back into work? Surely those companies should provide at least some contribution to those costs.

Mr. Mandelson: The hon. Gentleman touches on an important issue, which we need to keep under review as we assist Siemens to find a future buyer for that plant. If those efforts are not successful, the issue of repayment of the grant will arise. Siemens did not receive all the money, and the management has told the Government that the initial grant will be repaid, as is right.

We are doing a great deal. In each region, the single regeneration budget will provide support for areas affected by closures. Following the Chancellor's comprehensive spending review, the Government are allocating new funding to regional development agencies across the country over the next three years. In the context of the RDAs' regeneration activity, projects helping areas worst affected by closure will be treated as a priority.

That is important work. I ask all hon. Members to keep a sense of perspective in their understandable and real concerns about job losses. There is certainly no comparison between the conditions we face today and those during the recession which was manufactured by the Tories in 1990.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham called this debate to paint a picture of doom and gloom across the country. I know that the CBI regional trends survey talks of falling optimism, but let us look at just some of the

facts and the picture across the country. In the eastern region, there has been a net gain of nearly 11,000 jobs over the past four weeks.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mandelson: I should like to develop this passage of my speech.

In the east midlands, there has been a net gain of more than 1,600 jobs over the past four weeks. In the north-west, there has been a net gain of nearly 2,500 jobs over the past four weeks—300 new jobs at Zeneca Pharmaceuticals in Cheshire, and 1,000 new jobs at the Vauxhall car plant in Ellesmere Port.

In the north-east as well, there has been a net gain of nearly 500 jobs over the past four weeks—200 new jobs in ship repair at A and P Appledore in Wallsend only last week. In Scotland, there has been a net gain of nearly 4,000 jobs over the past four weeks—270 new jobs at Seagate microelectronics, and 1,000 new jobs in new Virgin Trains call centres. In London, almost 1,900 new jobs have been created since the beginning of the financial year.

I am not saying that the picture is not mixed: of course it is. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Only a Tory Member of Parliament, trying to make political capital, could ignore the simple fact that the British economy is still creating more jobs than it is losing: more than 400,000 since May 1997. Indeed, it is still growing, albeit modestly.

Mr. Redwood: Before the Secretary of State concludes his remarks, will he answer the questions that I have asked him in the motion, which I worded, and in the letter that I sent him in advance so that he had plenty of warning to research his answers? The House and industry needs to know which of the many public policy recommendations in the McKinsey report he and his colleagues will implement; otherwise, business will be mired in uncertainty, making its task even more difficult.

Mr. Mandelson: I have already responded to the right hon. Gentleman about his letter on milk quotas, new hotels and the like—questions on all of which are perfectly important and serious. They will, of course, receive a serious and considered reply in due course. That is exactly what he would expect.

I have not yet finished my speech—the right hon. Gentleman will be disappointed to hear—because I want to make the point that not only do this Government have a good record in job creation, but we continue to attract record levels of inward investment. We are still, this year, leading the way in Europe. If the Tory analysis were right, surely investors would be turning their backs on us. The facts show otherwise.

A report from the United Nations, which will be out tomorrow, will show that the UK received substantially increased inward investment flows last year. Our share of EU investment rose to 34 per cent., compared with 28 per cent. in 1996. Over recent months—this is very important—the case load of the Invest in Britain Bureau has risen by 10 per cent. compared with the same period last year. That is a significant and reassuring development. I notice that it has not been cheered by the Opposition—it is, of course, bad news for them. What is good for the British economy is obviously bad news for the Conservative party.

Mr. Leigh *rose—*

Mr. Mandelson: No, I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is too late. He had his chance to cheer.

In the concluding part of my speech, I want to talk about the future. To emerge with strength from what is without doubt a very difficult period for the British economy, we need to continue to attract high-quality overseas investment. We are far from complacent; there is a always a great deal more for us to do to attract high-quality inward investment. In addition to inward investment, we must bolster Britain's supply of home-grown productive capacity and competitiveness. That task is certainly equal to coping with the short-term problems brought about by the global downturn.

Our predecessors had no such ambition or creative vision. They specialised only in destruction—of industries, jobs, regions. Of course things needed to change in British industry and the economy. The problem was that their policies failed to support the creation of successful British businesses, with expanding numbers of jobs rooted firmly in the UK. They failed to bring Britain into the fresh industrial revolution—the revolution of the new knowledge age. That is the challenge that I have set for my Department.

Mr. Redwood: Claptrap.

Mr. Mandelson: The right hon. Gentleman says, "Claptrap." What world is he living in?

Mr. Redwood Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Mandelson: No. The right hon. Gentleman does not realise that the generation, harnessing and application of knowledge is the sole source of comparative advantage in our economy.

Mr. Redwood *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mandelson: He says that that is rubbish. We do not want any more of his rubbish. We need knowledge applied throughout the British economy. The theme of the White Paper that I shall publish next month will be to equip Britain to succeed in the knowledge-driven economy.

We are already world leaders in some of the most advanced sectors of the economy, such as computer games and biotechnology. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] That is not a result of what your Government did—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not my Government.

Mr. Mandelson: That is as a result not of the Conservative Government, but of what entrepreneurs and business people did for themselves. They are the ones to be credited with the success of the computer games and biotechnology industries—not the Tories. The problem is that no big British business has grown out of those sectors—no Microsoft, no CISCO, and not even a

[Mr. Mandelson]

software house such as SAP in Germany. Once upon a time, we grew such companies—and not just through mergers. I want this country to do so again.

We shall see, too, firms in traditional sectors innovating constantly—not just sunrise and new technology companies. Mature industries and companies must apply knowledge, innovation and imagination to what they do just as much as everyone else, in order to improve production and processes, and to keep and grow their market share.

There are some important success stories in Britain in our pharmaceutical and aerospace industries, but too many firms are just not innovative enough. They do not spend enough on research and development to generate knowledge. They do not put enough into skills. I want innovation to be the watchword of all business in Britain. How we achieve that has already been touched on in the pre-Budget report, and will be addressed further in the White Paper, although I can say that we shall succeed only if we create open, competitive markets in which British companies can compete, thrive and achieve rising market shares.

We shall succeed only if we create and exploit knowledge, including our science base, upgrade skills, spread knowledge of best practice—to help businesses learn from other British businesses so that best practice can flow throughout the economy and there can be lasting improvement is as important a job for the Department of Trade and Industry and the Government as any—and, above all, help entrepreneurship to thrive once again, harnessing through enterprise the best of Britain's brilliant record in scientific discovery.

That is why the Government will invest to give our entrepreneurs the knowledge with which to work, why we are putting £1 billion into British science, and why we shall forge better links between our universities and businesses, so that new enterprises and businesses spin off, and we excel not just in scientific discovery but in scientific enterprise and business. That is the challenge facing us.

Amid all the undoubted pressures on British business, it is vital to realise that it is possible to talk ourselves into a greater slowdown than is necessary. That is what we have heard from the Conservatives this afternoon. They must understand that, for perfectly understandable reasons, confidence in many British businesses is fragile. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] That is a lesson for us all to heed, not only those of us in government.

However, I am afraid that today's Tories do not have the guts or the integrity, when they start talking about the British economy and the prospects for British business, and as they indulge themselves in their doom-laden language, to act on the recognition that they, too, have a responsibility. That is why their motion is unworthy, self-serving and a discredit to them. It deserves to be rejected by the whole House.

5.10 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): At least until the last couple of minutes, I was beginning to agree with the Secretary of State in his aspirations for the future of our economy—including our manufacturing industry, which is the subject of the motion. However, I am afraid that some of what he said much earlier I also did not find convincing.

The right hon. Gentleman made great play of the need to avoid talking down the British economy, and I agree that we should have confidence in our economy and in our work force. However, when he commented on the forecasts that he had seen concerning whether we were going into recession, he was careful to speak in terms of "the economy". I agree that the economy is not going into recession—but the debate is about manufacturing industry, and that is a different story.

I am not here to talk down manufacturing industry for any political advantage. I am talking about it because I am concerned about it, and I have to say that an incredible degree of complacency has been shown towards the crisis that it faces. If we do not recognise that crisis, how can we start to help?

Why are the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer so confident that manufacturing industry can avoid recession next year, when almost every other analyst forecasts such a sharp fall in output? I am sure that the Secretary of State knows that every month the Treasury contacts 29 City analysts and forecasters to find a private sector consensus on the economic forecast for the following month.

Is the Secretary of State aware that, after last week's pre-Budget report, my colleagues contacted all 29 of those analysts to establish their latest consensus on GDP growth and manufacturing output growth? The consensus forecast for manufacturing output growth next year was minus 1.2 per cent. Whether we like it or not, and whether we are trying to boost our manufacturers or not, the forecast is for a manufacturing recession. We should be aware of that, and take measures to try to ameliorate or even avoid it.

The Treasury uses the same forecasters—the ones who are forecasting minus 1.2 per cent. growth—so where did the Treasury dream up its forecast of zero growth next year, which carefully avoids slipping into the negative? That is not good enough.

It is interesting to note the response of the private sector and the City analysts. The Hong Kong and Shanghai bank says that the Chancellor's expectation that output will dip only to zero in 1999 is

"so far out of line with the survey evidence on the sector that it is barely credible".

I heard what the Secretary of State said about the latest CBI survey, but we should still listen to what the CBI says, because its survey takes place across industry as a whole; it is not made to prove any particular debating point. The latest CBI survey underlines the crisis. According to the Deutsche bank, the results of that survey were "truly awful".

No wonder the survey is truly awful if exports are falling at the fastest rate since measurement in volume terms began. No wonder, if output is falling so much more rapidly than expected, at the sharpest rate for more than seven years—

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chidgey: I shall make a few more points first.

Even more worryingly, the fall in domestic orders has been the greatest on record since 1992. We used to worry about skill shortages, but with manufacturing heading for recession, restraints on output due to shortage of skilled labour are at their lowest level for four and a half years.

Mr. Bruce: The Government misunderstand why we are so passionate in trying to tell them that they have got their statistics wrong. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the House when we last went into recession, but many of us will remember going as Back-Bench Members to see Ministers and tell them that businesses knew that business was going into recession, even when the Treasury statistics said that it was not and that everything was fine. The position is not exactly the same now, because there has been a change of Government, but the Treasury and its statisticians are still the same.

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Gentleman may be interested to hear that I was, I believe, employed in the construction industry at the time to which he refers. I won a by-election, which, as he will know, is not a recipe for continued employment in this place. None the less, I remember saying when I won my seat in Parliament, during that recession, that as a by-election winner I was glad to have a safer job than before. That made the point to my colleagues in the construction industry.

The last time that the CBI quarterly industrial trends survey was as negative as it is now was in 1981, when manufacturing output was falling at 5 per cent. per annum.

I am not trying to talk down British industry. I am proud of what my colleagues in industry have managed to achieve over the centuries and will continue to achieve in the future. However, if we do not recognise the problem we cannot start to provide solutions.

The net result of the slump, and of the Government's failure to act decisively to stabilise the economy and to improve the climate for business, is the forecast of minus 1.2 per cent. growth. If that trend goes further, we could see 400,000 job losses in the next two years.

I would not wish that on any Government, let alone on the individuals who will suffer from it—but that is what we face, and that prospect is what we must address if we are to improve conditions for British industry. Manufacturing industry is now in a life-and-death struggle. Over the past 20 years, employment in manufacturing industry has dropped from 7 million to about 4 million. If that goes on, as the forecast trend suggests, it will drop to 3.5 million in two years.

The Government have to ask themselves how close, if that happens, Britain's manufacturing industry will be to falling below the critical mass that we need to maintain ourselves as an international manufacturing base. How long would it be before Britain no longer had the manufacturing capacity, the resources or the skills to compete with the major players in the global market?

It is a long time since this country was a major manufacturer of machine tools. I am sure that other hon. Members too, get frustrated when they go round factories and see that every machine tool is manufactured in Germany, Switzerland or anywhere else but in Great Britain. We led the world in industrialisation.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) *rose—*

Mr. Chidgey: May I finish my point?

I could name a host of manufacturing products which have disappeared from the list of products made in this country. Wind farms are one of the greatest ideas for capturing energy resources and developing sustainable energy, yet people who try to buy equipment to build a wind farm in this country find that it is all made elsewhere. We do not even manufacture windmills to augment our energy resources.

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman is making a characteristically thoughtful speech. Does he acknowledge that at least half the machine tool use in this country is still represented by home production, and that major machine tool manufacturers such as Germany and Japan also have a lively import trade because there is much exchange of technology and specialisation in that sector?

Mr. Chidgey: I am heartened to hear that; at least all is not lost. My concern, however, is that we are on the verge of losing all that.

The Secretary of State was quick to follow the Government line of blaming the global economic downturn for the problems that our manufacturing industry faces. The collapse of the Asian markets was mentioned, and the right hon. Gentleman was quick to blame low productivity and poor management for our problems.

The reality is that the collapse of the economies of south-east Asia, Latin America and Russia has had little effect on UK exports. We export more to the Netherlands than we do to south-east Asia, Latin America and Russia put together. In reality, UK manufacturing export markets are predicted to grow. Tables A2 and A5 of the Chancellor's pre-Budget report show that, over the next four years, UK manufacturing export markets should grow at an average rate of 7 per cent. a year. That is our export markets—not the global economy. My concern is that Britain's exports to those markets will grow by only 4 per cent. Why are we taking up only half the opportunities that exist in those growing markets? I ask the Secretary of State to accept the Chancellor's figures.

The reason why we are not capturing those markets or penetrating them as much as we should is the overvalued pound. That is an old cry, and Government Back Benchers will try to drown out that point of view. However, the Secretary of State must agree with his Treasury colleagues that since the Government came into office, sterling has lost more than 10 per cent. of its competitiveness. That has had a direct bearing on how well we can succeed in our export markets for manufactured goods.

Will the Secretary of State accept the acknowledgement in the pre-Budget report that, over the next year or so, the effects of the pound's overvaluation will work its way through into our manufacturing economy in the form of lost orders and lost jobs? Both the high pound and high interest rates are a direct result of the Government's failure to rebalance economic policy.

While businesses are calling for a clear statement on where the Government stand on the single currency, the Government seem content to kick the matter into the long grass—to use a phrase which has become fairly current recently. *[Interruption.]* Government Back Benchers may criticise, but this matter is very important to manufacturing industry. Businesses need clear guidelines.

[Mr. Chidgey]

The Cabinet seem to be engaged in a curious dance around the issue. The Secretary of State is reported to have said, "When we join the single currency." Then, quick as a flash, the Government enforcer said, "If we join the single currency." Some Ministers say "in", others say "out". It is, "In, out, in, out, shake it all about"—new Labour, new hokey-cokey.

Industry needs a decision. Firms want clear guidance. It is not good enough to stand on the sidelines, watching the game, saying, "If the play is going our way, we might join in." By that time, the game will have moved on, and we will be left for ever on the sidelines in the reserve team. That is not good enough. If the Government are serious about helping manufacturing industry overcome the approaching crisis, they must make a statement of intent. They must set out a clear programme for a referendum and clear proposals for what they intend to do about the joining date for the single currency.

Even if the Government made a statement of intent—and that would be weak enough—it is generally accepted that the process would still take three years. No one in British industry will start to make the preparations and investment that will be needed unless they have clear guidelines.

The Government need not only to try to avert the immediate crisis facing manufacturing industry—and the forecast of hundreds of thousands of job losses—but to address long-term practices. I was interested to hear the remarks of the Secretary of State about how he intends to set up some initiatives to try to improve the skills base of the country, and his response to the suggestions in the McKinsey report. Chapter 3 of the pre-Budget report, on productivity, sets out the problems clearly, and I agree with most of the analysis. However, I find trouble with the proposed solutions. The Government show clear signs of tinkering around the edges and covering the whole lot up with a large dollop of waffle. I want some clear ideas.

The Government are proposing tax breaks for research and development. The Secretary of State may, however, be aware that the Institute of Fiscal Studies has said that such broad tax initiatives are rarely, if ever, able to achieve their objectives. Does the Secretary of State agree that targeting assistance to small, start-up firms—the sort of firms that he was describing—would be far more effective than a broad-brush approach across the whole sector?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the proposed broad-brush tax breaks are a drop in the ocean compared to the extra taxes imposed on business? I do not wish to follow the Conservative party's line of claiming that every measure to try to improve conditions in the workplace should by definition be abandoned. The Secretary of State knows that I do not believe that. Let us be fair and honest, however. When we talk about taxes and tax relief on business, the right hon. Gentleman should know that the money that business is saving through cuts in corporation tax amounts to only about half the additional direct taxes that the Government have placed on business since they have been in office.

Does the Secretary of State accept the view in the McKinsey report that the major causes of poor productivity are not necessarily poor skills and low investment? The report suggests that those factors could be effects rather than the root cause. I should be interested to know the Government's response. If the Secretary of State accepts that the root cause of industry's problems is the need for modern commercial regulations which remove from businesses all the barriers that prevent them from adopting best practice—of which he is in favour—he has a responsibility to make sure that the Government strip away the bureaucracy that is stopping British companies performing at their best.

Combining the pre-Budget report with the McKinsey report produces some interesting concepts of what could be done, and of what is not being done. The pre-Budget report put great emphasis on education and training. Who would argue with that? Liberal Democrats have long argued for the need for long-term investment in high-quality education and training for all those under 19.

Mr. Bercow: And for themselves.

Mr. Chidgey: From a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) clearly demonstrates that he has need of further training himself.

The pre-Budget report sets out plans for the long term. However, even if the Government provided the funds for those plans to work, it would take a generation before we started to reap the benefits in manufacturing industry. The crisis is now. The interesting thing is that we have a pool of skilled labour facing unemployment—up to perhaps 400,000 people in the next two years. Surely those people should be first in the queue for investment in up-skilling and retraining.

I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State refer to the work that he is overseeing on the rapid response fund and the single regeneration grants—and I think he said that the regional development agencies would get extra money. However, the infrastructure, the bureaucracy, the training and enterprise councils and the training budgets should be much more sharply focused, so that high-quality training can be provided to those people who are losing their jobs now. If the Government take the action that they should, and there is an upturn in manufacturing industry, those people—with a proven record as good employees—will get back into work and will be ready to do their jobs, putting British industry back on the map, where it belongs.

5.28 pm

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): This has been an interesting debate.

On a general point, we must judge the Opposition's motion against their record in government and their policies for the future to decide whether the two match and whether they could improve on the policies that the present Government advocate.

British manufacturing industry faces three difficulties. First, we are in the downturn of the business cycle. We cannot do away with that cycle, but the art and trick of economic management is to ensure that the peaks are not too high and that the troughs are not too low, so giving businesses the long-term confidence and stability to invest in the future.

The second problem, which is peculiar to British manufacturing, is that, although we have many first-class manufacturing companies which can compete with the

best in the world in terms of productivity, performance and quality, we also have a long tail of companies that have not yet reached world class. Part of the job of government is to assist in the preparation and development of those companies to make them world-class performers. In the past few years, the difficult exchange rate has exposed such companies' weaknesses and it has been more difficult for them to compete internationally.

Thirdly, we must not forget the extent to which specific sectors of the economy have been hit by the recession in the far east—they have lost both markets and competitiveness. Many job losses in the north-east have little to do with the first two factors but a great deal to do with the downturn and recession in the far east, and we must be realistic about that.

I am not an expert on manufacturing industry, but during my time as a Member of Parliament I have tried to get in touch with businesses in my constituency. I can compare the performance of the previous Government with that of the present Government by dealing with a number of local companies and with what is happening in my part of central Lancashire. I mentioned earlier the problems of Leyland Trucks. In the early 1990s, the company, which was then owned by DAF, went into receivership. Leyland's 100-year history of truck manufacture nearly went down the pan.

According to the local papers, my predecessor as Member of Parliament seemed more concerned about the performance of England's cricket team than about retaining those jobs in Leyland. The company was preserved, largely owing to assistance from Lancashire county council—which was then led by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman)—through Lancashire Enterprise, which put together a package. The company brought in new production methods. It has now been taken over by Paccar—an American company which also owns DAF—and production of 4,500 trucks a year has been transferred from Holland and Belgium to my constituency. At the time of the crash in the early 1990s, the company employed 500, but it now provides about 750 jobs, and the figure will increase to more than 1,000 with new truck production. Those jobs have been clawed back and transferred because the company has developed a world-class competitive base and has been able to compete with Europe.

The aerospace industry, with its factories in Warton and Salmesbury, is the major employer in my constituency, even though the factories are not based there. I visited Farnborough this year and am a member of the parliamentary forum of the Society of British Aerospace Companies Ltd., which develops close links with parliamentarians. Clearly, our aerospace industry is enjoying a period of great success. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Government are playing a key role in forging the consolidation of that industry throughout Europe, which is crucial if the industry in Britain is to provide jobs for future generations. That is one way in which our Government can be and are being proactive.

More jobs are also being created in my constituency as a result. A few weeks ago, British Aerospace announced that it would transfer the production of Airbus parts from the Salmesbury plant to Scotland to make room for the increased production of military aircraft at Salmesbury—in particular, Eurofighter, which is soon to go into production.

There are clear signs, however, of a skills shortage in the skilled engineering industry in central Lancashire. The local authorities and the training and enterprise council need to put in place packages to ensure that the skills base is there for the future to support the aerospace industry and the chain of small and medium enterprises that supply it.

On a different tack, Schwan's pizzas—an American company—is one of the major employers in my constituency, with 700 employees. I presented awards to members of staff at one of its gatherings earlier this year. At the time, the company was talking about changes in production and the possible closure of a plant in the south-west. I bumped into the managing director at a business awards ceremony a few weeks ago at the University of Central Lancashire and asked how things were going, expecting that if all the tales we were hearing about recession were true, he would be talking about laying people off. In fact, the factory in the south-west had not closed because demand was so high, and he had taken on additional staff in Leyland to meet production targets. Those may only be straws in the wind, but the picture of universal recession in manufacturing is not justified for all locations.

Since the general election, I have met South Ribble business leaders every three months at business breakfasts. I also have regular meetings with the Central and West Lancashire chamber of commerce. Indeed, I attended a meeting there last Friday. Again and again at those meetings, people have expressed concern about interest rates—the reduction last week was welcome—and exchange rates. We recognise that the exchange rate against European currencies is lower than it was at the time of the general election, but there are still problems in markets in the far east. Businesses in my constituency want stability. People have pointed out to me that interest rates increased from 5 per cent. at the general election to a peak of 7.5 per cent., but they are now down to 6.75 per cent., which is a favourable rate compared with the 15 per cent. that we had for a year in the early 1990s. We have not seen the big swings that took place under the previous Administration.

Business men are concerned about bureaucracy and the amount of paperwork facing small businesses. Some movement and change is necessary there. The important thing is that this Government will listen. The figures that the Secretary of State outlined at the beginning of the debate show that even though the Conservative party talks about doing away with regulation, they introduced more than they got rid of. Small businesses appreciate that fact.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is making a considered speech and we are all listening with interest and courtesy, but I must pick him up on the point about regulation. Will he at least acknowledge the factual position, which is that in the last two and a half years of the previous Government—after enactment of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994—there were 37 deregulation orders, whereas in the first 18 months of this Government, there have been only five?

Mr. Borrow: I shall not argue with the hon. Gentleman's statistics, but the business leaders to whom

[Mr. Borrow]

I have spoken did not see the previous Administration as being supportive in getting rid of regulation. I can only give the House my own impression.

As regards regional development policy, it is important to recognise that the economies of different parts of the United Kingdom operate differently. I have been greatly encouraged to see the communities of Preston, South Ribble and Chorley come together in a public-private sector partnership to develop the Central Lancashire development agency, with a view to working with the regional development agency for the north-west when it is established next year to develop an economic policy for central Lancashire. I am a CLDA board member, and I was encouraged at last Friday's meeting to see the way in which the business community and the private sector are working together to bring jobs to the area.

Two major sites in central Lancashire are primed for economic development. One—the former Royal Ordnance site—sits largely in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle). The second is in my own constituency, at Bamber Bridge. Both sites could provide thousands of jobs, and the community wants them to be developed to provide well-paid and highly skilled jobs. One benefit of having a development agency is that the community can have its say and play its role in the development of economic policy. Matters are not then driven entirely by market forces and by whoever buys the land for ad hoc development.

Problems exist for manufacturing industry. In speaking with members of the business community, I have heard that companies are looking through their order books and considering what is going into their banks. The feeling that there may be a huge recession round the corner is causing companies with good order books and sound businesses to fall into the danger of putting off investment and spending decisions. That feeling that conditions may turn down rapidly is not justified by the facts, but we must recognise the scale of the problem if we are to handle the downturn and the problems that have resulted from the collapse of the far east economies, the business cycle and the competitiveness of UK manufacturing industry, particularly in relation to our European competitors. We must be carried away neither by complacency nor by pessimism.

I shall conclude with a comment on Conservative policies, particularly the Conservative policy on Europe. I have yet to attend a meeting with business leaders at which there has been a groundswell of opinion in favour of our not joining the European single currency. The message that comes to me frequently, particularly from manufacturing industry, is that single currency membership should come sooner rather than later. That would make it easier for our businesses to operate, and to compete.

5.43 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I am glad to be able to speak in an important debate, and I congratulate my colleagues on the Front Bench on obtaining a debate on manufacturing industry and factory closures. I was extremely disappointed by the arrogant—some might say sneering—response of the Secretary of State to the legitimate concerns that have been raised. Manufacturing and factory closures are particularly important to the west midlands. I am disappointed not to see a single Labour Member from my part of the world listening to the debate. Nor has any Member from Birmingham been here to make a point about the grave concerns facing manufacturing industry in the west midlands.

A small part of Rover's Longbridge plant is situated in Bromsgrove, and the rest of it is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden), which borders mine. Some 14,000 people are employed at Longbridge, and 40,000 further jobs across the west midlands would be at risk if the plant were to close. Sadly, difficulties at Longbridge mean that 50 supply industry jobs in Bromsgrove—at UEF, which hon. Members may remember under its former and more famous name of Garringtons—have already gone because of the problems created for manufacturing industry by the Government's economic policy.

Some 1,500 jobs were cut at Longbridge in the summer when people on short-term contracts were told that the contracts would not be renewed. It will be a miserable Christmas for many of my constituents, because they have been put on short-time working, and their so-called Christmas holiday will be extended to keep them away from work. BMW management say that 25 per cent. of components for Longbridge should in future be outsourced abroad rather than in the west midlands, at an estimated saving of £250 million.

On top of that, there is the Mini. We were all looking forward to the relaunch of the Mini at its historic home at Longbridge, but the relaunch is in jeopardy as the car may be made at Rover's Cowley plant instead. The bottom line is that the Government have been told by BMW's management that they have until the end of November to come up with a scheme to ensure that Longbridge is not run down or discontinued. They have until then to ensure that the plant has a safe long-term future, a future that is in the interests of all of us, but particularly in the interests of my constituents.

It is legitimate to ask how we came to that position. How did our great flagship plant come to face such difficulties? It is a shame that the Chancellor is not obliged to appear this evening, for it was he who blamed the Longbridge workers for their situation, telling them that they were not productive enough. He said that it was their fault that the plant faced the terrible prospect of closure. The Chancellor's remarks were deeply offensive and hurtful following the great strides taken by workers at the Longbridge Rover plant. The days of Red Robbo under an old Labour Government in the 1970s have been left far behind. The work force have vastly improved their working practices, showing great willingness to protect their jobs by working in a modern market.

It is not true to say, as the Government do, that the workers are to blame and that productivity is the problem. It is not comparing like with like to say that Nissan workers in Sunderland have created the most efficient car plant in the country, with 98 cars per worker, while Rover's productivity is much lower, at 33 cars per worker. Nissan has a purpose-built plant on a green-field site with the most efficient and modern equipment, which produces the most efficient output possible. The Longbridge plant has existed for many decades. It is a distinctive brown-field site, situated on three little hills. Therefore,

the two cannot possibly be compared and it cannot be said that it is purely the workers' fault that productivity is so low.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend may not know that the all-party motor group visited Land Rover at Solihull. I think that both sides of the House acknowledge—certainly the previous Secretary of State opened it—that that is probably among the most modern plants in Europe, if not the world. I wrote privately to the then Secretary of State about that plant's concern at the way in which the economy was being managed. The pound and interest rates were much too high and its German owners had said that it would not continue with the expansion and would have to start cutting back. That shows that it is nonsense to blame the lack of productivity at Longbridge for its problems.

Miss Kirkbride: My hon. Friend makes the point to which I wanted to come. The problem is not one of productivity alone. Workers and management understand that productivity must be addressed. The Government acknowledge that, but, most unfairly, blame productivity for the problems at Longbridge. The crisis in the Longbridge car plant is the result of the Government's management of the economy. The high pound and the high exchange rate created the present difficulties.

Maria Eagle: I have the front gate of a car plant, although not the plant itself, in my constituency—Ford at Halewood—and Vauxhall is at Ellesmere Port in the north-west. Both are old car plants which are now expanding vastly. How does the hon. Lady explain the difference between what is happening at Longbridge and what is happening at Halewood and Ellesmere Port?

Miss Kirkbride: I am glad that the hon. Lady has raised those issues. If she will forgive me, rather than give a direct answer now I shall address those points in my speech; the House will understand my speech better if I am allowed to deal with those points in the order that I see fit.

The Longbridge plant suffered particularly from the high exchange rate resulting from the Government's decision to make an independent Bank of England which misjudged the rate at which interest rates should be set because it was not capable of knowing the Government's wider economic policy. Interest rates were kept too high for too long with the result that the pound shot through the DM3 ceiling, which I cannot remember its reaching before. For some time the pound reached a completely unacceptable level for manufacturing industry.

Earlier this spring the Longbridge plant was able to hedge its currency transactions. It had bought forward at an exchange rate of DM2.40 to the pound. Sadly, that arrangement came to an end just when the Government's exchange rate policy meant that there were over DM3 to the pound. The effect of that was that the price of the Rover 400 made at Longbridge shot up in Germany from DM29,000 to DM39,000, vastly overpricing that car in the German market, with the result that Rover exports completely collapsed.

At the same time, Rover faced difficulties in its home market. Because the pound was so high, resulting in cars coming from abroad at a much cheaper rate than had previously been experienced, the British car market was flooded with Italian, French and German cars, which, because of aggressive marketing, could be sold more cheaply in Britain. Other European companies were looking for somewhere to sell their cars because, as a result of the collapse in Asia, they were not able to sell their cars in the same volume in that market. They looked to our market which provided easy pickings because of the Government's exchange rate policy. As a result, by the end of this year, BMW will face a £600 million loss at the Longbridge plant.

Mr. Hoyle: What the hon. Lady says does not quite add up, because Rover cars are 30 per cent. cheaper in Europe than in the United Kingdom, and, in fairness, French cars coming to Britain are up to 40 per cent. dearer than in their own market. Therefore, I cannot see the logic of what she is saying. Is she looking for a cash investment for Longbridge from the Government? Is that what is needed?

Miss Kirkbride: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is only making a debating point and that he really does know that every home market has its own considerations and, sadly, the price of cars on the continent does not necessarily impact on the price of cars here. Like must be compared with like, and a DM10,000 increase on Rover cars in the German market would clearly cause a major problem for BMW when it tried to sell the Rover 400 in that market.

The hon. Gentleman rightly asks what should be done. The first point, which I hope will not be lost on the Minister, is that the Government's economic policy has some bearing on the situation. I notice that, for all the protestations that the Bank of England is independent, Treasury Ministers at least have recently asked it to listen to their pleas for a reduction in interest rates which, to the satisfaction of the House, is what we had last week.

Mr. Leslie: Would the hon. Lady suggest that independence for the Bank of England be scrapped?

Miss Kirkbride: It is difficult to say that the Bank of England is truly independent when members of the Monetary Policy Committee are appointed by the Government on relatively short-term contracts. Independence is not as clear cut as it might be in America and Germany. However, that is something of a red herring when we are discussing the real issue of my constituents' jobs at the Longbridge car plant.

The biggest problem facing Longbridge is where to go from here. It is clear that the unions have shown their willingness to co-operate in any way that they can to make those jobs as secure as possible, and I congratulate them on that. Although criticisms have been made of the BMW management they are rather unfair. BMW has invested £2.5 billion in the Rover car industry in the United Kingdom since it took it over. Land Rover has been a great success. The Cowley car plant is clearly doing better than Longbridge. BMW has shown itself willing to invest in the production of the new Rover 75, which had a fabulous reception at the motor show until the management acknowledged the difficulties at Longbridge. That clearly has put rather a damper on things.

The success of the Rover 75 needs to be reflected in other new models that can be built alongside the Mini at the Longbridge plant if the jobs of my constituents are to

[Miss Kirkbride]

be secure. To that extent, I come back to the point made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle). I think that I am right in saying that, earlier this year, £43 million was given to the Ford plant at Halewood. Similarly, Vauxhall has had money through restructuring grants in order to improve its productivity and its production plant. Conservative Members, and, I hope, Labour Members, do not want to go back to the situation whereby good money was poured after bad into plants that would never be productive and which could never be a success story for British industry.

Where there is willingness to invest in new models and new plant, DTI grants are available which could help BMW to restructure and to provide jobs and security at Longbridge. When will the Government talk to the BMW management in order to secure those jobs? When will the amount of money that is available within the framework of DTI grants be negotiated with the BMW management so that we can all feel that there is not just a more secure Christmas ahead of us but a secure new year and a secure 2000 and beyond for the Longbridge Rover car plant? I should be grateful if the Minister would respond to the concerns that I have raised, and if her boss would respond to them before the 30 November deadline.

5.59 pm

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. The Opposition motion before the House condemns

"the Government's failure to take urgent action to give manufacturing a chance".

It is interesting that the Opposition now want to give manufacturing a chance. I believe in judging people by what they do as well as by what they say. In that context, it is important to look at the record. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) made clear his view that mistakes were made at the time of the recession in the early 1990s. Although he was in government at the time, he hinted that he had not agreed with the then policies and had taken action behind the scenes—to the extent that a Minister can while retaining collective responsibility—to try to change them.

My memory of the previous Administration goes back a little further than 1990, to 1979. There was not just one major world recession which the previous Government's policies made worse than it need have been; there were two. The first was between 1979 and the early 1980s, and I shall concentrate on the period between 1979 and 1981. The Opposition motion condemns

"the continued spate of factory closures".

The previous Administration were not content with closing factories; they shut down entire industries. They were not concerned with a factory here or there, but closed most of our shipbuilding and steel industries and almost all of our mining industry.

Within 18 months of coming to power, the Conservatives had managed to close more than 20 per cent. of our manufacturing industry. It did not happen uniformly across Britain but affected some constituencies more than others. Although I did not represent my constituency at the time, I was watching closely what happened in my city of Liverpool. The previous Government closed most of the automotive factories in my constituency, including Dunlop and Triumph—Ford managed to survive the shock, thank goodness—and the matchmaking factories. They closed 25 per cent. of Liverpool's manufacturing industry within 18 months of coming to office. Is that what the motion means by giving manufacturing a chance? It is not my definition.

When studying a Government's record, one must also look at their general election manifestos. Given the absolute devastation that had been visited on Liverpool, particularly on its manufacturing capacity, I looked at the 1983 Conservative election manifesto and at what they claimed they had done. I noticed with interest that the years 1979–81 were missing from the statistics. One would have thought that the Conservatives had first been elected in 1981. The result was that all the lines on the graph went up instead of down.

The Opposition have been working at collective amnesia for years. It is not new to them. They have got it down to a fine art in the motion before us. They appear to forget that they gave manufacturing no chance when they were in power, when they had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Hayes: It is most interesting to hear a history lesson, but if the hon. Lady is so interested in manifestos, I refer her to the Labour party manifesto, which talks about improving chances for businesses, boosting employment and giving business more support. How does she reconcile that with recent job losses, closures and ever greater regulation on businesses of all sizes?

Maria Eagle: I shall go on to answer those points. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman does not want Labour Members to deal with history. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Wokingham made that very point in his speech and tried to pre-empt any reference to history by Labour Members. The previous Government's 18-year record needs to be looked at, given what they are calling on the Government to do. The hon. Gentleman will admit that 18 months is not as long as 18 years. The time will come—at the next general election—when the people of this country can judge this Government on their record. There are already welcome signs that the Government are taking more heed of the needs of manufacturing and employment—of individuals seeking employment and those who need to shift from job to job and industry to industry—than the previous Government did during 18 years in office.

The Government's amendment recognises the fact that it was not just in my constituency that manufacturing jobs were destroyed under the previous Administration: 2.75 million manufacturing jobs were destroyed during that period. The Opposition may not want to be reminded of that record, but it is relevant to the debate.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Lady has laboured the point that Conservative Members do not want to discuss history. Is it not more important to discuss what our constituents and people throughout the north of England want to hear about—what the Government will do to stop factory closures and job losses? She is perfectly entitled to raise issues of history, but she would be well advised to focus on what people outside want to hear.

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry will deal with those points

when she winds up the debate. I have only about 10 minutes, which is not enough time to go into much detail.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Lady is subcontracting.

Maria Eagle: Back Benchers cannot subcontract to Ministers. I have less time than my hon. Friend the Minister to answer the point raised by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). I simply seek to discuss the Opposition motion, which finally

"urges the Government to change policy before more jobs are lost."

I was listening carefully to the initial remarks by the right hon. Member for Wokingham, which were extensive, to hear precisely what the Opposition's policy prescriptions were, but I heard not one suggestion. We should be told in a little more detail what policy changes the Opposition would suggest to put the problems right. Given their extensive experience of the destruction of manufacturing jobs, they might just have a helpful suggestion. Perhaps in the winding-up speeches, the Opposition Front Bench will say what we should do.

The House will probably be glad to hear that, as other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall discard about half my speech.

There are now 400,000 more jobs than when the Government came to office, although they are not in manufacturing and we must look closely at that. However, it is a sign of improvement. We have low long-term interest rates to encourage manufacturing investment, which will help in the medium and long term. Hopefully, the new deal for the long-term unemployed and people who were excluded from the labour market during the previous Administration will help people to get the jobs which they are currently unable to access. In the medium term, that will make a big difference to individuals, manufacturing and employment creation.

6.8 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) for being brief, and I shall be brief so that other hon. Members can speak. I am rather sad, however, because the hon. Lady had an opportunity to tell Government Front Benchers what her constituents want. Of course it is good fun to knock the previous Government, but Conservative Front Benchers cannot, for the next few years, give her constituents what she is looking for.

I listened with care to the Secretary of State. One never wants to insult or attack someone who has decided to leave the Chamber and not listen to the speeches, and we are told that he is a man of great ability, a great wit and a great spinner, but what he was spinning today was great nonsense. I understand that his grandfather, Herbert Morrison, was asked what socialism was. He replied, "Whatever a Labour Government do." That makes him the grandfather of all spin doctors.

The Secretary of State tried to pretend that the 400,000 jobs that have been created since the Labour party came into power were not created because of Conservative party policies, and tried to pretend that the fact that unemployment has been coming down in the United Kingdom for a long time, under Conservative and Labour Governments, was also not due to Conservative party policies. I think that I have been consistent in my advice to Conservative and Labour Governments about listening to what is happening out in the real world, and the Government are foolish in the way that they treat advice from Conservative Members.

I can speak about factory closures. I was made redundant in 1975 because of the closure of the Edwards Scientific Instruments factory, which operated on behalf of Sinclair in producing calculators. That was a growth market and one of the areas that should have been thriving, even though the then Labour Government were creating unemployment in all directions. The company listened to the blandishments of the Labour Government to take people on—through one of the schemes that they introduced to try to prevent unemployment—in subsidised employment.

The scheme was so complicated that it took the Government a year to come back to the company and say, "For some technical reasons, we have decided that you will not be allowed to get the money." The plug was pulled on the £500,000 that it thought it would receive through that wonderful scheme to employ hundreds of people to make electronic calculators in Yorkshire. The company was so extended by expanding its work force that, once the plug was pulled by the Government, the bankers said, "Oops, sorry, we'll pull the plug as well." The company went down and hundreds of people lost their jobs.

I tell that tale not because I want to bash the previous Labour Government—although, clearly, as a Tory I would love to do that—but because it reminds us of what is happening today with the Government. When the Labour party came into power, it rightly identified long-term unemployment as the part of the unemployment figures on which it should concentrate. The figures had been coming down rapidly under the Conservatives, and the momentum continued when the Labour party kept to most Conservative spending limits.

The Government keep telling us about the new deal, however. I asked the Library to find the figures showing long-term unemployment coming down, using statistics for the past 10 years.

Maria Eagle: The new deal has only just started.

Mr. Bruce: The new deal has only just started, but let me give the figures. When the Government were operating under Conservative party policies—in the April to July 1997 quarter—27,000 young people, and 37,000 over-25s, came off the long-term unemployed list. In those days, we had fresh start interviews, job clubs and an economy that was working well. Obviously it is early days, but what happened for young people between April and July this year, after the new deal came in and we had all those pilot schemes? Not 27,000 off the list, and not hundreds of thousands of people going on to the new deal, as we have been told, but 2,500 people off the list—a tenth of the number—and that under the same Labour Government.

What about older people? The new deal has not come in quite so quickly for them, so the figure has gone down from 37,000 off the long-term unemployed list to 10,000 off it.

Maria Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: Perhaps the hon. Lady thinks I am being unfair, but let me finish the statistics, or she may dig herself a hole.

[Mr. Bruce]

I have not mentioned the worst quarter—January to April 1998—when the Government were telling everyone how much they would do under the new deal. The number of long-term unemployed went up by 1,200. We shout at Ministers to allow us to intervene in their speeches and say that the new deal is not working. No wonder they do not allow me to intervene, because I have the statistics—all the deal.

New deal was a new deal, but it contained four jokers, I reckon: the Government stopped the fresh start interviews, which were working so well; they closed the job clubs; they took all sorts of money out of the jobcentres; and £5 billion in extra taxes was put on the utilities. Those companies could have reduced their prices to consumers by £5 billion, or they could have been told to spend the £5 billion creating new jobs, but no: the £5 billion was taken out and used for this so-called new deal—the four jokers.

What happened in the rest of the economy? We were warned that boom and bust would come again. We were getting up to growth rates of almost 3 per cent.—the boom—so we had to jam on the anchors. Interest rates had to go up, exchange rates were pushed up and we had all these extra regulations. That was completely wrong. When we were in office, I argued with my own Front Benchers that interest rates were too high. I experienced the charm offensive years ago, when people told us, "If only we had an independent bank, interest rates would come down automatically—overnight—by at least 1 per cent."

Real interest rates are the ones that people talk about. Remember, German inflation is about 1.5 per cent. and real money is borrowed at 4 per cent. The real interest rate is about 2 per cent. or 2.5 per cent. What is it here? Our interest rate for borrowing money is 9 or 10 per cent.—not the bank rate—because there has to be 1 per cent. or so on top. That is more than three times the rate of inflation, which is why we have great problems with investment in this country. If independence for the Bank of England gives us that, I for one would say, "It is proven; we were right not to give it independence." By the next general election, we will be able to judge whether we should bring the Bank back into political control.

If people do not believe my arguments, they should page the parliamentary data and video network and look up Peter Shore. He made the same speech on the Bank of England almost all the time, and his speeches would persuade Labour Members, as well as Conservative Members, that independence for the Bank of England was no panacea.

What about this unsustainable growth of 3 per cent. on which we had to slam the brakes, to prevent us from reaching such a level? What is the Chancellor telling us? He is saying, "We will have terrible growth this year and next year, but we will get back up to 3.1 per cent." Why did we put the brakes on? Come on: if it was right to put the brakes on and to put on high interest rates because of whatever legacy the Conservatives were supposed to have left, it certainly was not right when all the disasters in Japan, the far east, the middle east and south America happened. That world recession was certainly enough to put the brakes on.

Mr. Hayes: I am most interested in my hon. Friend's analysis. Is not the truth that the Bank of England was remarkably insensitive to that change? It was slow; a politician would have been more reactive and more sensitive to opinion and circumstances and would have been able to react more quickly. The Bank of England has done too little, too late.

Mr. Bruce: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. The Government trust in bankers and their good sense, so why have they appointed Mr. Don Cruikshank to persuade the bankers to lend money to industry in a more sensible way, even though we rely on bankers to tell us what interest rates should be for our industry? That is completely wrong.

I want to mention the working time directive, because there is an issue of bad drafting. How many people realise that someone who starts working for a company on 1 July, in a couple of years will get four weeks' paid holiday, as he has always done, but each year he will have to take all his summer holiday by the end of June? Do Labour Members realise that? People will not be allowed to save any of those four weeks forward.

Every company for which I have worked had a policy of allowing a week or so to be transferred forward. That could be agreed, but there are absolutely no derogations in the working time directive on holiday pay. That will affect all our constituents, because hon. Members did not bother to consider the regulations closely.

What about the position locally? I am fortunate enough to have in Weymouth an economy that is working well. Unemployment is still going down, and we have not yet had any disasters. I do not talk the economy down or try to destroy jobs. When the Royal Navy was leaving Portland in my constituency, the previous Government had policies that amazed me. Every Department seemed to know that there was a problem in Weymouth and Portland and was able to do something about it, whether it was building a new land registry or building new roads.

What do we have now? We have First Portland and Portland Port Ltd., and an enterprise centre is being set up using the single regeneration budget grant. We are facing hard times, however, because the single regeneration budget and assisted area status are under threat from the Labour Government. We were promised a relief road, but that has been delayed. The South Dorset economic partnership was established with little Government money. The money came from the training and enterprise council, but TECs have had money taken away from them and given to the regional development areas, so the South Dorset economic partnership has had to close. We are now to lose the last bit of the Navy base. The Government have it in their power to release this land for productive use. At least three people want to bid for it, but the Government will not release it until next year.

The Government must look at the lessons that we learned during our last recession and accept that it is not Conservative Members who are talking down the economy: they have done that for themselves.

6.21 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak on this important occasion.

Under the Tory Administration, which this nation endured for 18 years, a business went bust, on average, every three minutes of every working day. That is not a

record of which to be proud. One in five households with someone of working age had no one in work, and at the end of their period in office there were more than 1 million fewer jobs than when the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister. Moreover, 800,000 people earned less than £2.50 an hour, and in-work benefits cost every taxpayer £160 a year. Britain slumped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league, and our investment level was one of the lowest of the 24 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Total manufacturing investment was lower in real terms in 1996 than in 1979. That is fact.

By contrast, we believe that industry and small and medium businesses are vital to Britain's economy because of the wealth that they create, the jobs that they provide and the ideas and technology that many of them develop. The Tories claimed that they were the friends of small businesses, but their actions told a very different story. In 1992, 65,000 businesses closed. The Tories were responsible for record business failures, with all the misery that that brings, more red tape and total inaction on late payment, crippling many small businesses. Taxes went up for small businesses and petty regulations multiplied.

Since the Labour party was elected, what have we been doing? We have been asked what we intend to do, but what have we already done? We have introduced a statutory right to interest on late payments, we are providing SMEs with better information and support and we are committed to cutting unnecessary bureaucracy and compliance costs. That is action: we are trying to do something, because something is better than nothing, which is what the Tories delivered in 18 years.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: No.

We are intent on giving British industry what it needs to thrive. We have set tough rules on spending and borrowing to ensure low inflation and to strengthen the economy, so that interest rates can be kept as low as possible. We are putting in place a medium-growth strategy, which encourages long-term investment and sustainable growth—not short-term growth, but sustainable growth for the long term.

We have rightly transferred the task of setting interest rates to the Bank of England. The Tories used interest rates as a cosmetic tool to hide their failure. We are making a major monetary activity more effective, open and accountable, and free from short-term Tory manipulation. Even the suggestion that the Tories may take back ownership of that important monetary policy dismays me, and would probably dismay most of British industry.

The Labour Government recognise that investment in training and in a skilled, flexible work force is crucial to Britain's future competitiveness. The Tories abandoned the young and those people with considerable skills who were forced into redundancy. The previous Administration had an abysmal record. I had the unfortunate pleasure of working in the docks, and I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friends. You were responsible for the wholesale closing of industries, and you did not give a damn what happened to those communities as a consequence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must use the correct parliamentary language.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Brady: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: No.

Britain's work force have fewer skills than those of our major competitors. You may not like—my apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I repeat that the hon. Lady must use the correct parliamentary language.

Mrs. Curtis–Thomas: The Opposition may not like to hear these facts, but they are true. Britain's work force have fewer skills than those of our major competitors. Less than half our work force are qualified to NVQ level 2 or above. According to the 1996 world competitiveness report, Britain has fallen from 42nd to 48th in the international education league. Youth training has failed more than half its trainees, many of whom have left within a few weeks of starting their training schemes.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: When I have finished these points.

What has the Labour party done to address those issues? Contrary to what Opposition Members have said, the new deal is giving young people the first chance they have had to participate in the workplace. I am delighted that that programme is now being extended to older workers and to lone parents, who are vital contributors to the economy and were ignored by Tory Administrations.

Improvements to and extension of the Investors in People programme has encouraged more employers, especially smaller firms, to train their work force. We have seen the biggest ever investment in the research budget, which is vital for investors and for the academic infrastructure.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: After I have finished this point.

That investment of £1.4 billion over three years includes a substantial contribution from Wellcome, and is one of the most significant private-public sector partnerships that this country has ever seen.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: When I have finished.

A radical numeracy and literacy drive has ensured that children in primary schools today will have the skills and ability to be the wealth generators of tomorrow. Industry and manufacturing were totally neglected by the Tories,

[Mrs. Curtis-Thomas]

but they are embraced by the Labour Government. We are not merely paying them lip service; we are introducing practical measures to enable them to survive and thrive.

Mr. Hayes: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I do not want to interrupt her flow, although perhaps that is not quite the right word to describe it. Before coming to the House, she spent most of her time in higher education.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hayes: The record suggests that she spent more time in higher education than in business.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: No.

Mr. Hayes: Perhaps the record is wrong. The hon. Lady may acknowledge that those of us who have spent some time in business understand the importance of overheads. What estimate has she made of the damaging effect of overheads as a result of the increasing bureaucracy and regulation imposed by the Government? Drawing on her enormous business experience, what estimate has she made of the effect that that will have on employment and jobs?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I have spent most of my working life in industry, in both the private and the public sectors. A small part of my working life was in the academic environment.

On overheads, I enjoyed—if "enjoyed" is the right word—the over-zealous activity of the Tory Administration, who produced the largest set of overheads that industry has ever seen.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Lady tell the House why the definition of a small firm that the Government use for the purposes of the late payment of commercial debt differs from the definition that they deploy for trade union recognition?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I shall allow the Minister to answer that interesting question on my behalf.

6.28 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): It has been useful for the House to debate these serious matters, which bear on the future of Britain as an industrial nation. They directly influence the mechanisms by which wealth is created before it can be spent on the social agenda of any of us. We need to create the wealth before we can spend it.

I shall make a few points clear at the start. First, Opposition Members want Britain to succeed as a modern industrial country. We have no intention of selling British industry short. Given my experience, and given the fact that my constituency contains Silverstone and the greater part, or a significant part, of the Grand Prix and formula one industry, I know what engineering excellence can amount to, and I realise how vital it is to the preservation and, indeed, creation of jobs. I recognise the central importance of manufacturing industry, alongside the service industries.

Equally—as long as there is proper consultation, along with correct and sensitive treatment of any redundancies derived from those closures—there need be no suggestion from Opposition Members that factory closures are always and ipso facto wrong. It might be entirely proper to close a factory in order to rationalise production and to increase productivity, which is the objective—albeit not always perfectly expressed—of the McKinsey report and, I think, of all who have spoken today. It may even be sensible to replace one factory with another, on the same site or elsewhere, to expand production or the product range. I am fond of saying, as a throwaway line, that any Member of Parliament can go along and open a factory; the really interesting task is opening a factory extension, or a new facility replacing an old one.

Decisions such as those are the daily responsibility of boards of management and business people. Given the Secretary of State's sneering responses to the reasonable comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) about productivity, it is possible that he is not the one who has experience of making such decisions; it may even be that he is the one who should be sharpening up his act. In view of the stress that he and others put on inward investment, however—rightly so, and we have a good record in that respect—let us not forget that there is no law of nature requiring foreign investors and their boards to come to this country. There is worrying evidence that that welcome tendency of recent years may be turning down. Nevertheless, we want boards based abroad, and overseas investors, to see Britain as a continuing base for their investment.

Secondly, we recognise that overseas economic conditions, disturbing as they are at present, are a vital part of the scene. They cannot be wished away, however much any of us would like that. I still find it strange that the Government can entertain the thesis that they have abolished boom and bust, while at the same time expressing worry about economic conditions. Perhaps they can explain how the two parts of that conundrum can be reconciled.

Mr. Bercow: In his characteristically polite and understated fashion, my hon. Friend suggested that it might be the Secretary of State who needed to sharpen up his act. Is his view not reinforced by the fact that, only last week, the Secretary of State said that the Government had no plans or proposals to lift restrictions on Japanese car imports? Two days earlier, in his pre-Budget statement, the Chancellor had announced precisely that.

Mr. Boswell: I was given a report to that effect, and I did not think much of the Secretary of State's reported contribution; but, if we are educating the right hon. Gentleman, that is an important part of our function.

Opposition Members do not feel that a one-sided caricature of our record in office over 18 years is a sufficient response from the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Government to serious, current, pressing issues. Government Back Benchers made interesting comments. In one contribution in particular, there was clear evidence—given the vehemence of the attack on the outgoing Government—of real concern about the Government's ability to deliver their objectives, however commendable those objectives were considered to be.

Let me put something on the record. I was particularly interested by a comment from the head of McKinsey, Mr. Bill Lewis, which was reported in *The Birmingham Post* on 30 October. He conceded that Britain

"had made great advances in the 1980s and early 1990s in deregulating its labour and capital markets and these were now every bit as competitive as those in the US."

I wonder who did that.

"The challenge now",

said Mr. Lewis,

"was to carry through the same sort of structural reforms in product markets".

That is a reasonable objective, and it is right that we should consider it.

It is clear to us, as we open our newspapers, that the industrial casualty list is lengthening day by day, with news of further closures and job losses that were well set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham and others. My constituency is poised between the—already known—major cuts at Barclaycard in Northampton, and the possibility of up to 5,000 job losses at Rover in the west midlands, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) in a worthy contribution. There is also the likely spin-off affecting components suppliers and the service industries. Only today, someone mentioned a "multiplier estimate" that, for every job lost in manufacturing industry, 3.5 jobs could be lost in the economy as a whole.

The examples that I have cited make the interesting point that not all job losses are in manufacturing industry. The financial services industry is also haemorrhaging, and it is of equivalent importance. We are concerned about both sectors.

Notwithstanding the reported remarks of the Governor of the Bank of England, this is not solely a question of one hard-hit region, although the problem is concentrated in the north-east. In towns on the south coast, losses are reported at Guardian Royal Exchange in Eastbourne and Folkestone, and Philips is to close its kettle factory at Hastings. I believe that, at its peak, it employed only 800 people, but now there are to be 160 job losses.

I do not wish to make Cookson a target of my criticism, but it provides another example of what has been happening to mainstream industrial materials groups. A weekend report of its results was described as offering a more gloomy than expected trading statement, with a share price fall of nearly 10 per cent. Profits had fallen sharply in the third quarter of the year. Cookson is a company that is central to the local economy.

Nor are prospects more encouraging. My right hon. Friend mentioned, in the context of the trading difficulties of Marks and Spencer, a report that the textile industry faces an estimated loss of 60,000 jobs. PricewaterhouseCoopers predicts a 40 per cent. increase in the number of insolvencies by the end of the millennium, only about 14 months from now. The Machine Tool Technologies Association's survey on demand, which I have before me, reveals some dreadful trend figures. We do not need to run down industry, because there is already an acknowledged problem.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): During the debate, news was faxed to me that the Colchester-based Spottiswoode Ballantyne and Ipswich-based Cowells printing firms have gone under, with a loss of 228 full-time employees.

Mr. Boswell: That makes the point eloquently. I am only sorry for those who have lost their jobs.

It is not terribly surprising that the Secretary of State should extend his new Labour initiatives to taking a close interest in the insolvency laws. That reflects the current equivocation in his Department. On the one hand, it is all right to introduce measures to enforce statutory late payment of debt; on the other hand, those who want to get their money back may not get it back from their creditors.

We now come to the Government's own role in this. They, of course, are programmed to deny: it is anyone's fault but theirs. Yet it is they who have increased business taxation through their acceleration of corporation tax payments, their raid on pension funds and a number of other measures—such as fuel duties—that have directly affected industrial costs. On top of that, they have piled on regulatory burdens to the tune of an estimated £14 billion over this Parliament, figures derived from their own compliance cost estimates. That is, of course, where we have those estimates. Only this week, I was told that we are not to have a compliance cost assessment for the "Fairness at Work" White Paper until the legislation comes forward. That is also before we aim off for what I might call a certain insouciance in calculating the figures, for example, for the Competition Act 1998 compliance costs.

Ministers never understand the sheer gut-wrenching effort that is required by a small business, for example, to comply with the requirements of record keeping, with a 17-week reference period for the working time directive and a separate four-week period for the national minimum wage. Only today, a medium firm employing 100 people told me that it would be taking on an employee. That employee was required for record keeping for those two functions, and so was not a productive employee, but that is the only type of employment that the Government can encourage. Of course, those figures are all on present labour costs, not on future ones.

The effect of all that is to load some £1,500 on to the cost of each British job. It is not surprising that there will be fewer of them. The effects have been damped by economic buoyancy—the golden legacy that the Government inherited from us—and the ability of firms to take out a year's foreign exchange cover, but, just as those are running out, we shall find the industrial consequences of last year's hike in interest rates and the escalation of the pound coming through.

The euro could make matters even worse if it is now going to work to a left-wing political agenda. If it softens and the pound stays high, that would be another blow to British industry.

My first advice to Government is simply to acknowledge the problem that they have. The second is to take some practical action to tackle it. Investment is not helped by the extra taxes on savings that they have introduced. Employment is not helped by the extra cost burdens that have been imposed on employers.

Just as the Government go around saying that industrial management should sharpen its cost cutting—and so it should—so Government can do some practical things to cut burdens on business: call a stop to extra regulatory burdens; freeze "Fairness at Work" until other burdens that they have already imposed have been assimilated; not impose green taxes on business unless other burdens on business are reduced at least commensurately; remember that other Government Departments have the capacity to do collateral damage to business unless the Government

[Mr. Boswell]

practise the joined-up thinking that they always talk about; remember that excess government spending is inevitably feeding through into interest rates; and put some downward pressure on both.

Maria Eagle: Just as we thought, the hon. Gentleman's prescription appears to be: pay lousy wages and cancel investment in the health service and education.

Mr. Boswell: If the hon. Lady believes that, she is providing a prescription for the destruction of jobs that has always accompanied past Labour Governments and will, I fear, accompany this one.

Somehow, I doubt whether the Government could do those things. I think that they will use the McKinsey report not to improve productivity but as an opportunity for grandstanding and showing off at the expense of business. They will not give credit to business and the unions for the achievements of the past 10 years in making at least a large part of British manufacturing internationally competitive. Rather, they will use it as a platform for windy exhortation.

It is the Government, not the others, who should be sharpening up their act. It is not kind to someone who is sweating their guts out to get orders to tell them they should do, yet any minor douceurs offered by the Secretary of State and the Government, for example, to small and medium enterprises or high-tech companies will pale into insignificance alongside their matching increases in business costs. For all Ministers' proud rhetoric, they still do not understand the simple fact that a 1 per cent. uplift in costs, although apparently minor in itself, translates itself into a much higher percentage effect on the bottom line, which is the basis of all business success and new investment.

British manufacturing industry, then, is in a serious situation, but that situation is not terminal if the Government help. Ministers have claimed that they have put an end to boom and bust, yet their real concern is to pass the buck. Their attitude to British industry is four soundbites and a funeral.

If the Secretary of State finds sweat, scurf and dirty overalls too distressing for his fastidious tastes, perhaps he should remember Oscar Wilde: "To lose one parent"—or perhaps to lose one factory—"may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose more than one looks like carelessness."

Ministers have already done great damage. Their amendment stinks of complacency. Our motion, which I commend to the House, tells them that, if they do not mend their ways and sharpen up—or, if they cannot do that, show even a little human compassion for the casualties of their folly—this will return to haunt them.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Today's debate has shown a cynical and desperate Opposition talking down the economy. Conservative Members are desperate for a recession for their own political ends and for nothing else, and what do they do to bring that about? They fly in the face of reality. They ignore the facts. They ignore the real job gains, and the fact that it is this Labour Government who are creating the economic conditions for long-term economic growth.

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: Let me make a little progress first.

Unlike the Opposition, the Government are in touch with reality. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has rightly pointed out, there is a serious downturn in the global economy and, yes, its effects have been felt by some companies in the United Kingdom. With one quarter of the world, including Japan, in recession, no country is immune from the effects of the instability in the world economy, but we are in a good position to survive the worst because of the prudent economic policies and actions that have been pursued since May 1997 to ensure the underlying strength of the economy.

The Government's job, amid all that, is to continue to ensure stability at home to withstand the worst effects of the world downturn and to create the conditions for sustained and steady growth. The response of all politicians—from the Government and hon. Members on both sides of the House—should be that we should not talk ourselves into recession.

The UK's economy is still growing. There is net job creation. I have yet to hear someone from the Conservative Benches admit that. Our economic fundamentals are sound, despite what the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) would have us believe.

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: What an embarrassment of riches, but it has to be the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) because I missed him at the Select Committee on Trade and Industry today, so he has his opportunity to ask me questions now. I was there for him this morning, but he was not there.

Mr. Bercow: I had a personal family commitment, so I hope that the hon. Lady will be understanding.

Why did the Secretary of State tell the Select Committee on Trade and Industry last week that his Department had made no estimate of the annual cost of the parental leave directive, when his Department had already published an estimate of an annual cost of £55 million? Why is he so palpably ignorant of the matters for which he is responsible?

Mrs. Roche: It is such a shame, because the hon. Gentleman tries so hard. I have great admiration for his efforts, but he must get a grip on reality. That is not what the Secretary of State has said. He does not need to get back to the school drawing board.

As I was saying, we should not talk ourselves into recession. The economy is growing. Despite the scaremongering by Conservative Members, our economic policies are grounded in reality.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: Let me make a little progress, please.

Our economic policies are grounded in reality, ensuring long-term economic stability and employment; encouraging business to improve its competitiveness; very importantly, exploiting Britain's science base; and meeting the challenges of the new knowledge-based economy. Let us ground ourselves in reality and look at the facts. Since May 1997, 420,000 new jobs have been created in the United Kingdom. Over the past four weeks alone, companies have announced 13,000 more new jobs created than jobs lost. Those are all new jobs in manufacturing industry, which reflect the Government's commitment to long-term economic stability.

Mr. Boswell: In view of her Department's concern about productivity and the fact that even the Chancellor has produced an estimate of growth in the economy next year that is far below the trend rate for productivity, will the Minister advise the House whether, and to what extent, job losses will rise in the year to come?

Mrs. Roche: I have some respect for the hon. Gentleman, but he must get a grip on reality. Under this Government, more jobs have been gained than lost. Of course the Government have been concerned about productivity, which is why my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Chancellor have been engaged with industry in looking at our productivity. That is what we want to address.

Mr. Chidgey: The Minister is talking about reality and saying that we should not talk ourselves into recession. Is it not right that she should make a distinction between the economy as a whole and manufacturing industry, which is what the debate is about? Does the Minister accept that the 29 City analysts that the Treasury uses to make its forecasts are telling us that, next year, there will be growth of minus 1.2 per cent., which is a recession? We should address that.

Mrs. Roche: If the hon. Gentleman would allow me to make some progress, I would tell him that, as a result of the global downturn, we accept that some companies have announced closures. However, the picture in manufacturing is mixed and some manufacturing companies are doing very well.

Unlike the Opposition, who seem to pray for redundancies and care only about the job losses that occurred in their party in May last year—that is what the debate is really about—the Government understand what factory closures mean for the real lives of those who work there and for the areas affected. We have taken steps to reduce the hurt caused by job losses by introducing rapid response groups, providing training and employment opportunities for those affected by closures and by working with the companies concerned, such as Fujitsu and Siemens, to help safeguard jobs.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Within that context, will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the partnership being established in Birmingham between Birmingham city council, the local training and enterprise council and the chamber of commerce to help the supply chain in the wake of the difficulties being faced at Rover? It is helping to ensure that that city is as well-equipped as it can be to withstand the challenges ahead. I ask my hon. Friend to welcome the visit made to Rover by our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. He visited the partnership and heard the discussions that took place last week.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. I congratulate all the partners involved. I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks about the visit made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who I know has a great deal of admiration for what is going on there.

We are targeting areas most in need through the single regeneration budget, European funds and assistance to companies. In drawing up our proposals for the competitiveness White Paper, we are taking into account the importance of small firms—much has been made of that issue, which was mentioned by the hon. Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) and by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow). It was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), who has a great deal of experience as a chartered engineer in industry. All those points were well made.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: I must make some progress.

In May 1997, we inherited an economy where growth was running at an unsustainable rate and where inflation was heading way above target. The public finances were in substantial deficit—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may not like the facts, but they are going to hear them. We have determined not to repeat the mistakes made by the Conservative party. That is why we have taken tough and decisive action—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Hon. Members must stop shouting at the Minister. No one should be shouting at the Minister.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do not mind Opposition Members shouting if they do not have any arguments.

We have taken action to prevent a return to the stop-go cycles of the past. We are determined to keep on course.

Mr. Bruce *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: I must make some progress.

The economy is still expanding and creating new jobs and inflation is at its 2.5 per cent. target. There must be no return to the boom and bust of the late 1980s and 1990s when inflation rose to nearly 10 per cent. and interest rates hit 15 per cent.

Overall, nearly 3 million jobs were lost in manufacturing when the Opposition were in power. They do not like to be reminded of that, but they are going to hear it. The Opposition had the cheek to suggest today that our policies are damaging employment prospects.

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: Please sit down.

The Opposition's attitude was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) in an impassioned speech. We have the policies for

[Mrs. Roche]

employment growth. We have achieved that through what we have done with the corporate tax system, with our reforms of capital gains tax and what we have done on better regulation.

The Conservative party had the cheek to say—the hon. Member for Daventry mentioned this—that our election to office would lead to inward investment drying up. Let us come back to reality. During 1997-98—the first year under a Labour Government for 20 years—my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau recorded more inward investment projects than ever before. There were no fewer than 618 in one year. It is the first time that the annual total has ever exceeded 500. I am expecting the letter of congratulation from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) in the morning.

Mr. Bruce: The Minister, who is always kind to me, can just catch her breath. I wonder whether she can deal with the important point which I made in my speech and which I think may have alarmed colleagues throughout the House. Article 13 of the working time directive deals with the fact that people have to take the leave to which they are entitled within the leave year. If somebody starts on 1 July, they must finish their summer holiday by 1 July.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is far too long.

Mrs. Roche: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. He will know that, when we drew up the regulations, we consulted industry. Under the previous Administration, under the premiership of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), 10,000 new regulations were introduced. I do not think that we need any lessons from the Opposition.

We have Ericsson of Sweden planning to move a major international operation to London and Silicon valley's CISCO Systems, a world leader in internet technology, is to build a major research and development centre in Britain. Volkswagen has confirmed heavy investment plans at the Rolls-Royce plant in Crewe where the work force of 2,500 is expected to grow. Those companies come here because they see the advantage of locating in the United Kingdom. They are attracted by economic stability—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) has just made an intervention. He is now making a speech while the Minister is speaking. We cannot have that.

Mrs. Roche: I am saddened by the behaviour of the Opposition, but I am not surprised, because they do not care. They do not want to hear the facts.

Inward investment cannot be our only source for new jobs. It must be matched by the creation of new home-grown companies and industry. That is what we want to do. We want more high-quality start-ups and more creative start-ups. We want to back those who want to take long-term risks and ensure that they can go on and prosper. That is why we are consulting industry and why we shall shortly publish our White Paper on competitiveness. That White Paper will include new proposals for promoting enterprise in the United Kingdom. We want to ensure that those objectives are achieved both regionally and locally.

Today's debate has shown that the Conservative party is out of touch with the people of the United Kingdom. I urge the House to reject the Opposition motion and to support the Government amendment.

Question put, pursuant to the Order [5 November]. That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 154, Noes 323.

Division No. 372] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David

Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Sir David Madel.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*

Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dan *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jane Kennedy and
Mr. David Jamieson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Order [5 November], and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises that the last thing business wants is a return to the boom and bust policies of the past, with interest rates of 15 per cent., inflation above 10 per cent. and a budget deficit averaging £41 billion a year from 1992 to 1996; welcomes the Government's decisive action in taking politics out of interest rate decisions, a move which the Opposition clearly does not support; notes that employment is currently 400,000 higher than it was when the Government came into office, and that long-term interest rates are at their lowest for 35 years; welcomes the measures that the Government has taken to encourage enterprise, investment and innovation, and to help unemployed people into jobs; welcomes the McKinsey Report as an important contribution to the productivity debate and notes that, unlike its predecessor, this Government acted to increase competitive conditions through a new Competition Act; and condemns the Opposition for its own record in government, when manufacturing employment declined by 2¼ million and Britain went into deficit on manufacturing trade for the first time ever in peacetime.

Orders of the Day

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, considered.

Lords Reason:

The Lords insist on their Amendments in page 2, lines 2, 15 and 18, to which the Commons have disagreed, for the following Reason:

Because electors should be able to vote for the individual party candidate of their choice.

7.15 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this it will be convenient to discuss also the Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendments, in page 3, line 46, at end insert—

'Review of electoral system

(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint one or more persons—

(a) to review the operation of the system of election provided for by section 3 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 as substituted by section 1 of this Act, and

(b) to make a report to the Secretary of State within six months from the day of appointment.

(2) The Secretary of State shall carry out his duty under subsection (1) within one month from the date of the first general election to the European Parliament which takes place after the coming into force of section 1.

(3) The Secretary of State shall lay a copy of any report received under subsection (1)(b) before each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Straw: I hope that I can be brief because we are covering some well-trodden ground. The other place has now voted twice to amend the Bill to change the nature of the list system for which it provides. On both occasions, I should add, had it not been for the votes of the hereditary Conservative peers, the Government would have won the day comfortably. The issue has now gone way beyond whether we have closed lists, open lists or Belgian lists: there is now a challenge to the authority of this democratically elected House by hereditary Conservative peers.

The Government have carefully studied reports of the debates in another place, as would be expected, and the arguments advanced in support of the amendments that were made, including the arguments advanced by the hereditary peers. However unsatisfactory its composition might be, of course we accept that the other place is a revising chamber. We therefore give proper consideration to any suggestion that it might make that a piece of legislation ought to be revised. Having done so, I am moving an amendment to make one important change to the Bill which we hope will meet some of the concerns that have been expressed.

The amendment would provide for a review of the new system to be carried out shortly after the first elections using it. It makes it clear that there will be a thorough examination, that one or more persons will be appointed by the Secretary of State

"to review the operation of the system of election"

and make a report to the Secretary of State

"within six months from the day of appointment",

and that any such report shall be laid before each House of Parliament. I then anticipate that it will be subject to a very full debate.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the Home Secretary say according to what criteria the review will be undertaken, and what the terms of the review will be?

Mr. Straw: The review will be very wide, as set out in the amendment—should the House and the other place approve it. The amendment states:

"The Secretary of State shall appoint one or more persons—

(a) to review the operation of the system of election provided for by . . . the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978"—

as amended by the Bill—and

"(b) to make a report to the Secretary of State within six months from the day of appointment."

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

I must make it clear that a review of the operation of the system does not simply mean a review of the counting process. If this House and the other place approve the amendment, the review will consider whether the closed list system itself operated satisfactorily. We are dealing with fundamental issues.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I welcome the review. It is very good news, and it will be greatly appreciated by people across the country.

Mr. Straw: For all the mocking laughter from the clones from the Opposition Whips Office, any welcome from my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) comes at a very high price.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the review enable the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly to review in their own right how the lists operate in Scotland and Wales?

Mr. Straw: The review relates only to the operation of European parliamentary elections. The Bill is concerned only with European parliamentary elections, so it could not possibly refer to any other elections. With respect to the hon. Lady, that has to be a matter for inclusion in the Scotland Bill and the Government of Wales Bill. I do not doubt that, once the elections are over, there will be many reviews of the way in which the system works; that is entirely right, as they are all new systems.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The review is a wonderful idea that has been much greeted by Labour Members, but would it not have been better, given the views expressed by their Lordships, by Opposition Members and most importantly by Labour Members when we debated the issue last week, to have an open list and review that?

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall come to the fundamental issue in a moment, but first I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Graham Brady. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Lansley: If such a review were to conclude that the closed-list system had operated in an unsatisfactory way, would it be possible to revert to an open-list system or another system without primary legislation? If that were not possible, the entire structure of the proposal would be undermined.

Mr. Straw: Before replying, let me remind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), a very fine Member of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is just as well that I was not drawing up any lists.

Mr. Straw: I shall work that into my speech later, when I come to the problem that the British public will encounter in differentiating between one Conservative candidate and another. Although the correctly named hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire is in error over his views, he is otherwise okay, as he went to a good school—the same one as I did.

There is a very good reason why it should not be possible to change the voting system by statutory instrument. We are dealing with fundamentals of our democratic system, and it would be wrong to change them by statutory instrument. If the review concludes that the closed-list system is the wrong system as it has produced all sorts of perverse results—and if that is what Parliament finally accepts, and I hope it is—there will be huge pressure on the Government to change. In any event, there will have to be a debate on the result of the review.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: As I have taken five interventions in eight minutes, I should like to make some progress. I shall then take interventions from my hon. Friends.

The other place decided to push for a fully open system in place of a closed-list system, which we believed was the most appropriate way for voters in Great Britain to elect their Members of the European Parliament. Let me explain—particularly to Opposition Members—how an open-list system would work, as the results of an open-list system are not quite as they might anticipate.

Under such a system, the elector casts his vote for a particular candidate on a party's list, or for an independent candidate. He cannot cast his vote for the party's list as a whole. The votes received by each candidate on a party list are then added together to give the party total. That figure is used to determine how many seats the party

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has won using the method devised by our old and sadly departed friend Victor d'Hondt, the famous Belgian. That is already set out in the Bill, and is relatively straightforward.

The party candidates must then be ranked in the order of the number of votes they have each received, and the seats are allocated in that order. So if the party wins three seats in a region, the seats are allocated to the three party candidates who won the most votes.

On the face of it, it seems a simple and fair system. However, as I explained previously—and with the approbation of the House—it has some perverse results and some major drawbacks. The first is that, under the open-list system, the candidate with the most votes is not necessarily elected. To the Conservative party, which believes so strongly in the first-past-the-post system for every election, that would be an overwhelming objection.

Let me explain how distortion and perverse results can occur. Under the open-list system, a party's total vote is the sum of the votes cast for its individual candidates. It may well happen that the total vote of one party—as I wish to be neutral, we shall call it party A—is high, but that that is due almost exclusively to the popularity of the first candidate on its list. Another party—party B—may have a smaller total vote, but that vote may be more evenly spread among all the candidates on its list. Each party B candidate could poll more votes than all but one of the candidates on party A's list, but party A would win more seats. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is looking confused.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Astonished.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Lady ought to be astonished by the astonishing result of the system that she proposes to vote for later this evening.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): The Home Secretary does not know why my hon. Friend is astonished.

Mr. Straw: I know exactly why the hon. Lady is astonished. Therefore, the second most popular candidate on party A's list will win a seat, even though he or she polled fewer votes than all the candidates on party B's list who are then not elected.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Does my right hon. Friend anticipate that we are likely to gain anything new from the review that we do not know already? Under the closed system, we will centralise power, and a few party hacks will determine who becomes a Member of the European Parliament. For us in the Labour party, that makes a bad situation even worse, as we all know that the people at the top of the list for the European elections have been decided not by one person, one vote, but once again by a panel of about a dozen people.

Mr. Straw: I do not accept what my hon. Friend says about the system of selection that we have used for establishing the lists. Conceptually, there is no difference between the closed-list system for multi-vacancy constituencies in the European elections and the system under which my hon. Friend and all Labour Members were selected. We are on party lists of one in our constituencies.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) is shaking his head, but he is wrong. There is no reason at all why, if we chose to do so, we could not have single-member constituencies, but open lists in which each party put forward two or three candidates and left it to the elector to choose. That would be the logical position for the Conservative party, but it is not what happens. If people want to vote Labour in Blackburn, they have only one choice. They have to put a cross against my name. Like it or not, in Blackburn Labour is Straw. In Blaenau Gwent, Labour is Llew Smith. They are closed lists. We have all accepted it for Westminster, and there is no difference of principle in respect of the European Parliament.

Sir Norman Fowler: The Home Secretary is inviting the House and the country simply to vote for a party. He is not giving people the opportunity to vote for a candidate. As recent experience has shown—with Labour candidates such as Gordon Walker—if the public do not like a particular candidate, even though he has the Labour label, they reject him. That is the point.

Mr. Straw: I do not call what happened in one constituency in 1964 recent experience, even given the longevity of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield.

Sir Norman Fowler: What about Tatton?

Mr. Straw: "What about Tatton?" he says, sotto voce, as well he might. That makes my point. There was a party list of one person. The right hon. Gentleman may not have noticed that the Conservative candidate for Tatton was rejected not just because he was Neil Hamilton, but because he was the Conservative candidate.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): That clearly proves the point, because the other parties in Tatton withdrew to avoid the dilemma of people who wanted to vote for their party, but did not want to vote for their chosen candidate. Is not the defect in the Lords amendment, which the Conservatives are supporting, that it would not allow people to vote for a party if they chose to do so, as so many do? The Belgian system, which the Conservatives failed to support, would have allowed that option.

7.30 pm

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman is right. I noticed that the language of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield suggested that voters should have an opportunity to vote either for a candidate or for a party. He said that they should have that choice. The open-list system does not give that choice, but requires voters to choose between anything up to 11 candidates on a list.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): My right hon. Friend rightly points out that all systems have anomalies. Under first past the post, it is possible for a losing candidate to get more votes than another candidate who wins. I welcome my right hon. Friend's review, because reviews are splendid things, but I do not understand how it is possible to review a principle. It is possible to review a procedure to see whether it is working well, but it is not possible to review a principle. Either one believes in voter choice or one believes in—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was far too long. The hon. Gentleman might be able to catch my eye later.

Mr. Straw: With great respect to my hon. Friend, it is perfectly possible to review the operation of the closed-list system, as I hope Parliament will accept, and to review it in the widest possible terms, as I responded to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). I do not follow my hon. Friend's other point. The one truth about first past the post is that, in any constituency, the candidate who wins the most votes wins the seat. He may not have won a majority of the votes, but he has to have won more votes than any other candidate. It is a very simple system.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: If I am able to make progress, I hope to give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

I was explaining that the open-list system could have the perverse result that a candidate could be elected with fewer votes than one who is not elected. That apparent inconsistency between the wishes of the electorate and the result would be difficult to explain to voters. It could also cause problems to a candidate elected with considerably fewer votes than a rival from another party. Would any of us like to be in that situation, going to the European Parliament having received 10,000 or 20,000 fewer votes than someone who was not elected? That winning candidate may have difficulty establishing themselves as a credible representative of the electorate.

There are other important drawbacks to the so-called open system. Already, very few people know who their Member of the European Parliament is or have any contact with them.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Please allow me to make progress. I always do my best to give way to hon. Members from both sides, but if I give way all the time, it eats into the time available to other hon. Members to speak.

I am not criticising the current MEPs, many of whom, from all parties, work very hard. However, there are only 84 MEPs for the whole of Great Britain, and the European Parliament's functions are not such as to permit the traditional constituency representation role performed by Members of Parliament and some leading councillors.

With the new, large electoral regions, that will continue to be the case. Many—indeed, most—electors will have no knowledge of any of the candidates standing in their region. The names of the candidates on the Conservative party regional list may well mean nothing to a Conservative supporter. Under an open-list system, he would be obliged to make a choice from among those candidates. He could not simply cast his vote for the Conservative party, as he would probably prefer.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that it would be a good thing for people to pay some attention to who they are voting for?

Mr. Straw: We know from nearly 20 years' experience of European Parliament elections that, given the nature of the institution, the size of even the existing constituencies and the nature of the functions, only a handful of MEPs have more than a small chance of gaining sufficient publicity to be as well known as each of us in our constituency and beyond.

I have the internal Conservative party leaflet about the London region Conservative European Parliament team. The party sets out clearly on the front that it disagrees with the proportional representation system and is just trying to operate it if it goes ahead. The only candidates on the list who are reasonably known are two former Members of Parliament—John Bowis and Ian Twinn—who were well known in their constituencies. However, the idea that they could become well known across Greater London is unrealistic—and they are not even at the top of the Conservative party list.

Not knowing any of the candidates, a voter is forced to make an arbitrary decision. It is highly likely that they will choose the simple option, and vote for the first candidate on the list. However, there is evidence that, if the first candidate is a woman—as is the case on the Conservative list in London—or the candidate's name identifies them as coming from one of the ethnic minorities, the elector will head for a male candidate or one with a traditional British-sounding name elsewhere on the list.

There is also a danger that an elector who knows that they will be forced to make a decision between candidates of the same party but feels unqualified to do so, may choose not to vote. Unfortunately, the turnout for European Parliament elections in this country is already low. We do not want it to fall any further.

That is why the Government consider the closed-list system to be the most appropriate for the elections. The elector casts a vote for a party list as a whole, or for an independent candidate. There is every scope for independents to stand. There is no option of voting for an individual candidate on a party list instead.

Mr. Sayeed: I have a rather non-British name, but I was also elected. One of the problems with the closed-list system as operated by the Labour party is that the order of the candidates is determined by the party machine. This is where most of the objections in the Lords came from. The candidate will feel responsible to the party machine rather than to the electorate. At least John Bowis, Ian Twinn and all other Conservative candidates were selected and put in order by party members at an open election.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is objecting to the internal processes of another party. Our party is run democratically. The Conservative party is now moving

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towards that happy state. I understand some of the concerns, but it is a parody of the system that we have used to suggest that selection was carried out simply by the central party apparatus. *[Interruption.]* Let us be clear that, in transferring to the proposed system of parliamentary elections, we were generously—almost certainly—handing out seats to the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party. *[Interruption.]* It is true.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No.

We had to manage that change, which resulted in very many fewer Members of the European Parliament than would otherwise be so, simply as a result of the elections.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I should like to make progress.

Opponents of the closed-list argue that being unable to vote for an individual candidate is somehow undemocratic or, dare I say, un-British. I profoundly disagree. Political parties are a vital and necessary part of our modern democratic process. Voting on party lines is not an alien concept to the electorate of today. As I have already said, each of us in the House stands on closed party lists of one.

It does not lie in the mouths of Conservative Members to suggest that we have an open list—we do not. If they wanted an open list for the Westminster Parliament, they should propose changes in our voting system so that two or three candidates stand for each of the parties, and the voter selects one. That is an open list. In Westminster, we have a closed list, and what we are proposing for the European Parliament is also a closed list.

Mr. Gill *rose—*

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I want to make progress; this is a relatively short debate.

Under a closed-list system, there is no prospect of an anomalous result. Nothing is hidden from the voter. When voters cast their vote for the party of their choice, they can see the order in which that party's candidates will win seats, and vote with that knowledge. If voters dislike the first candidate on the party's favoured list, they are in exactly the same position as under the first-past-the-post system. Voters can choose not to vote for that party, or grit their teeth and put the party first despite its poor taste in candidates.

The closed-list system has the great benefit of simplicity. That is an important consideration, which we should not ignore. *[Interruption.]* On Thursday, Conservative Members complained about the Jenkins proposals on the basis that they were complicated. That was one of their many objections. Yet the system that they are proposing in this debate is gratuitously complicated, and will produce even more perverse results than some systems of proportional representation.

I remind hon. Members of what Professor Patrick Dunleavy and Dr. Simon Hix of the LSE, and Dr. Helen Margetts of Birkbeck college, said in their publication "Counting on Europe":

> "Open list ballot papers are more complicated. The ballot paper will be much longer because all the candidates will have to be listed with tick boxes. People may feel obliged to look over all the names, a lengthy business in the South East region where with 11 seats there could be 40 or more candidates . . . some people such as the elderly, those who have difficulty reading, first time voters, and people who are just attached to the existing way of doing things may dislike the ballot paper or find it confusing . . .
>
> A major study of voting systems carried out just after the 1997 general election provided good survey evidence that British voters do not like complicated ballot papers with multiple names and tick boxes and strongly prefer simple short ballot papers."

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Will the right hon. Gentleman take it as a compliment if I suggest that all that he has said in the past half an hour is an excellent argument for sticking to first-past-the-post elections?

Mr. Straw: No, I do not take that as a compliment, much as I admire the hon. Lady. I set out my position on Second Reading on 25 November—almost a year ago; it has been consistently consistent. I made it very clear that the system of voting should be appropriate to the institution that is being elected. Nobody can seriously argue that acting as if the very large European Parliament constituencies were Westminster constituencies is satisfactory.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Some of us are opposed to lists whether they are closed or open. Some of us are opposed to closed lists because of problems of bureaucracy and who controls them, and open lists because members of the same party fight each other for a seat. That is not an argument against proportional representation, because different PR systems can function. I know where I stand on the Lords amendments: I will abstain in the vote, as I did previously. The Government's amendment in lieu proposes a review. I need to know how I stand on that. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that Lord Jenkins will not be in charge of the review?

7.45 pm

Mr. Straw: Lord Jenkins is far too busy to do it. I cannot absolutely guarantee that, but I think that the possibility is remote. I shall quote Lord Jenkins later.

I ask hon. Members on both sides of the House to take into account another consideration before they vote. The Conservative party needs to think about this very carefully. We have been debating this issue for getting on for a year, during which all parties have undergone a selection process and have chosen the candidates for their lists. If Parliament were to reject the Bill, the consequences for the electoral system would be very severe.

Although I acknowledge that the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) did not agree with the principle of the Bill when he spoke on 27 October, he said the following sage words, which Conservative Members ought to heed:

"parties have already chosen their candidates. We are coming to the end of the Session and to implement change at this stage would cause chaos and difficulty."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1998; Vol. 318, c. 192.]

Mr. Forth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Straw: No; I wish to proceed. I know that the right hon. Gentleman wants me to consider very carefully some words in the Jenkins report.

One thing has changed since we discussed this issue at the end of October: the report of the Jenkins commission has been published. We discussed it at some length on Thursday, and I do not want to go over that ground again. I shall just deal with one point, which was raised in the other place, about what the Jenkins report said about open and closed lists. The Jenkins commission was concerned purely and exclusively with elections to this House. We are discussing elections to the European Parliament—a body very different in composition and scope from the other place. As I said a moment ago, the electoral system for the European Parliament—and many other institutions—ought to be appropriate to that institution.

The people of the United Kingdom have always enjoyed close links with their Members of Parliament, and that would remain if the system recommended by the Jenkins commission were adopted—whatever views people take about its merit. By contrast, only 84 MEPs are elected from 11 regions for the whole of Britain. In such circumstances, voters will not be in a position to have detailed knowledge of the candidates or to make informed choices between them.

Lord Jenkins dealt, in his customary elegant prose, with what would happen if we ended up pretending to give voters choice but did not give them information. He says:

"Where that choice offered resembles a caricature of an overzealous American breakfast waiter going on posing an indefinite number of unwanted options",

the system

"becomes both an exasperation and an incitement to the giving of random answers".

It is fine prose, and accurate, too. The report continues:

"In voting rather than breakfast terms, exasperation may discourage going to the polls at all and randomness lead to the casting of perverse or at least meaningless votes. Some people may want to be able to choose between candidates of the same party, but many are interested only in voting for parties, and would not appreciate being forced into choosing between candidates of the same party about each of whom they know little".

The Lords amendments would force electors to vote for candidates of a party about whom they know little, or, on occasions, next to nothing.

Mr. Forth: I refer the Home Secretary to the point that he made in passing, alleging that there would be chaos if we, as a result of the parliamentary process, had to revert to the first-past-the-post system. I remind him that, exactly 20 years ago, all parties were faced in the first European elections with the task of selecting candidates for an election that was exactly the same length of time away. They were all able to do so—even to the extent that my party had the extraordinary good sense to select me for a European constituency. The electorate showed even greater good sense by electing me.

Mr. Straw: I rest my case. If ever there was an argument against that system, that is it.

In the other place, there was some suggestion that the Jenkins report recommended an open-list system, and therefore—oddly, given the position that they have taken on the report—the Opposition prayed Jenkins in aid. However, Jenkins did not recommend an open-list system for the top-up Members, nor did it recommend the Belgian semi-open list. Instead, it recommended its own variation of the Belgian system.

The report's solution was, it must be said, somewhat complicated. Voters would be able to vote either for the list as a whole or for individual candidates on the list, as in the Belgian system. Although the list votes would help to determine which party or parties got the additional seats, only the votes cast for individual candidates on the list would determine which candidates were actually elected.

Mr. Barnes: Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Straw: No; I have already given way, and I want to get to the end of my speech.

No electoral system is perfect. All we can do is to attempt to match the most appropriate electoral system with the body that it is being used to elect. In the closed-list system, we believe that we have found the best match. It is no coincidence that it is the system that voters in Germany, France, Spain, Greece and Portugal use to elect their Members of the European Parliament. Of course, that is not a reason in itself for adopting the closed-list system, but it shows that we are not embarking on some astonishing constitutional innovation. Our proposal is not the great leap in the dark that has been portrayed.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The Home Secretary has made a distinction between the way in which the closed list operates as between the parties and the electorate, and the way in which any list, closed or open, is used in terms of the internal party processes to select Conservative or Labour candidates. Will he explain one thing to me, in my ignorance?

Is there not one way in which the internal processes of, let us say, the Labour party intersect with the measure before us, in that the one advantage of an open-list system is that it prevents a party from slipping a Mickey Finn into the cocktail? Does it not thus prevent a party from putting a person who for some reason would not be popular with the electorate, high up the list, so that the voters can do nothing about it?

Mr. Straw: I do not accept my hon. Friend's reasoning, but to pick up his metaphor, plenty of Mickey Finns have been elected from time to time on both sides of the House—people who are not especially acceptable to the electorate, but who have been put into safe seats, sometimes by their party machines. The electorate have closed their eyes, voted for those people as candidates on the closed list of a party, and they have been elected. I do

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not suggest that my hon. Friend was elected through that system, but I remind him again that he was selected, and appeared on a closed list of one. The principle at stake here is no different from that according to which he and I—and every other Member of the House—was elected.

I ask Opposition Members to bear my final point particularly in mind. They claim that the closed-list system is anathema to the British constitution, has never been used before and breaches some fine democratic principle—a principle so important that it makes it acceptable for hereditary peers to override the will of the elected House of Commons.

What the Opposition, in their high-blown phraseology, forget is that they were the first party to use the closed-list system in the United Kingdom. That may come as a matter of some astonishment to them, but they voted for it; they introduced it. Of course, that was in Ireland, so perhaps they think that it does not count. However, Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sayeed: It had a particular problem.

Mr. Straw: Oh, it had a particular problem, did it? So the system was okay for Ireland, was it? I think that I shall take that as an admission. Now we have an admission that the closed-list system was all right for Ireland because there was a particular problem, and it needed an election using what the Conservatives said was a fair system.

Indeed, the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), did not say that Ireland needed the closed-list system because it had a particular problem. Speaking of the identical system, including d'Hondt, to that which is now before the House, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I believe that this is a fair and balanced system that will produce a representative outcome".—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 498.]

Sir Norman Fowler *rose—*

Mr. Straw: That is what the former Prime Minister said about the system, and that is what we believe about the same system for election to the European Parliament. I commend the amendment in lieu to the House.

Sir Norman Fowler: The Home Secretary sat down very quickly then—and rightly so. What he said at the end of his speech was one of the cheaper points that he has made. The example that he used was drawn from an election for the deliberative forum on Northern Ireland, in the special circumstances of Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Gentleman quoted my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the former Prime Minister. I should point out that, on the same occasion, my right hon. Friend, replying to a point made by the then Leader of the Opposition, said:

"I agree with his view that the electoral solution is not ideal".

He went on to say:

"I have to say that there is no precedent that I know for the circumstances and complexities that exist in Northern Ireland. If I had been able to find an easier compromise more familiar to people across Northern Ireland, I assure the House that I would have found and advanced such a compromise."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 500-02.]

The Home Secretary's example was a cheap debating point that does not match up to the seriousness of the issue before us. The right hon. Gentleman has had difficulty with the subject, and he has convinced neither the Opposition nor, in my judgment, his own side of the House. We certainly shall not accept the proposal for review, in spite of what was said by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), because it does nothing to answer the case against the closed list in principle.

The right hon. Gentleman's case seems to be that choice is far too difficult for the public, so he will make the decision for us. It is not so much a matter of "trust the people" as of "trust the party". That goes totally against what most Members on both sides of the House believe. The Home Secretary was more at home when he was having a bash at the House of Lords than when he was defending his own proposals.

The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) was correct: there is one simple clear issue in the debate—the difference between a closed list, whereby the public vote for a party and not a candidate, and the open list, whereby the public can choose a named candidate to represent them. If that is the only choice that we have in the debate—and it is—I have no hesitation in opting for the open list.

I make it clear that the Opposition do not support proportional representation or the regional list. We prefer and would support the first-past-the-post system. That is what we have argued for and, judging by my own experience of the time when my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who was then my local Member of the European Parliament, represented that area of the west midlands exceptionally well, it works in the European context.

The Government, with their overwhelming majority, have forced through their proposition none the less. The House of Lords has not challenged that basis for the election. As we are to have proportional representation and a regional list, the only issue at stake is how the public will elect their Members of the European Parliament.

The Government say that the party should choose Members of the European Parliament who will represent the public, and that the public's right to choose will be confined to voting for a party. They can vote Labour or Conservative or Liberal Democrat, and the party will provide the list of candidates in the order of ranking—

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Or SNP.

Sir Norman Fowler: Yes; the public can vote for other parties too. I do not wish to offend anybody. The point is that the Government want the party to decide the list of candidates and the order of ranking.

The Home Secretary criticises the House of Lords and the role of the second Chamber, but he avoids the real criticism: the fundamental argument against his proposed system is that it is anti-democratic. It leaves the final decision in the hands of a party.

Even if a party does what the Conservative party has done and holds a one member, one vote selection conference, or does what the Liberal Democrats have

done and holds postal votes, the decision remains with the party. There is no escape from that—the party decides who will be elected. Thus we will have the kind of position to which I referred when we last debated the issue.

8 pm

To return to the subject of the west midlands, I wish to refer to the case of Christine Oddy. Miss Oddy is a sitting Labour Member of the European Parliament, representing Coventry and Warwickshire North. In the selection process, she was defeated by a former "EastEnders" actor, whose main claim—according to Labour's press office—was that he had been in a show at the Birmingham rep earlier that year. Not surprisingly, Miss Oddy was irritated—I put it no higher than that—at the selection. Her case was set out in the *Birmingham Post* on 24 September under the headline "My Anger at Labour Betrayal."

Miss Oddy modestly claimed on radio this week that she was better known than Edwina Currie. I am tempted to respond, "Particularly in her own family." However, let us accept her claim, which goes to the heart of what we are debating tonight. Under the system proposed by the Government, her knowledge of the west midlands and her reputation do not matter a jot. She could be better known than Margaret Thatcher and Barbara Castle put together and it still would not matter, because the party has put her seventh in a list of eight candidates. No one—least of all the Labour party in the west midlands—expects to win seven seats in the European elections.

I am not likely to vote for Miss Oddy and, frankly, the Home Secretary—had he a vote—would not be likely to vote for her either. The point is, however, that she has been deprived of standing as a named candidate on her record, and the public have been deprived of judging that record and expressing their choice.

Dr. Tony Wright: Is there not something slightly "Oddy" about the right hon. Gentleman's argument? Last week, we listened to his colleagues, to a man and woman, arguing for a closed list of one and against voter choice. Now we are hearing exactly the contrary arguments. Are we witnessing a conversion, or simply a contradiction?

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman may have heard that we would prefer the first-past-the-post system, but, lest he did not, I will underline that again for him. I thought that I had made that clear, as had a number of my hon. Friends. In this case, however, first past the post is not a choice that we have: the choice that the Government propose is not first past the post but a system of PR. The issue—and the hon. Gentleman may have been the first to say this—is whether we have a closed or an open list.

Let us be frank. There are very few people outside of the Government Front Bench who support the proposed system. The last time we debated it there were about two dozen Labour Members here, and there were about two dozen arguments against the proposal. No serious figure on the Labour Back Benches has come forward so far in favour of the Home Secretary's proposals. The reason is simple: the system transfers power to the party bosses—we all know that—and to the centre. The system takes power away from the people.

Frankly, it is an extraordinary system for the Labour party, and a Labour Government, to propose. That is why the leader in today's edition of *The Times*, under the headline "An open and shut case", said that closed lists are bad for democracy. It went on:

> "Mr Straw's patronising approach puts backroom machinations of party politics above the will of the electorate."

It called on the Home Secretary to think again—not that he showed much inclination to do that.

We all know that the Home Secretary does not believe in the system either. That is why he so is thankful to move from defending the closed list to attacking the House of Lords whenever he has the opportunity. Even that will not work, however. Among those who have voted against the Government in the upper House are well-known "Tories" such as Lord Shore of Stepney, Lord Stoddart of Swindon and Baroness Jeger.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the debate in the House of Lords on 4 November came from another former Labour Member of Parliament who abstained from voting but demolished the case for the Government's proposals. Actually, I think that Lord Callaghan also deliberately abstained. The Labour peer to whom I am referring was Lord Evans of Parkside, a Member of this House for almost 24 years. He said that he had known the Home Secretary for many years and had worked with him closely. He had served for three years on the national executive of the Labour party. He even said that he had the greatest respect for the Home Secretary and for the pamphlets that he had written.

Lord Evans added, however, that he was sure that the Home Secretary would not be too upset if he said that the Home Secretary's speech on 27 October in the House of Commons was

> "not one of his most profound."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 281.]

Lord Evans always did understate his case. He added—most significantly—that every Labour Member of Parliament who had spoken to him on the subject had made it clear that they were opposed not only to the closed list, but to the Labour party's method of selecting the candidates.

The only people consistently to have supported the Home Secretary's plans are, of all people, the Liberal Democrats. The irony of that is that they say they believe in the open-list system. They have argued for it, but when it has come to a vote they have consistently voted against it—the kind of politics that the Liberal Democrats have made distinctively their own in this country.

Mr. Beith: The right hon. Gentleman has forgotten that, in Committee, we proposed an open-list system—the Belgian system—but that he and his colleagues did not support it. Can he explain why that happened, and why he is now supporting a system that does not even allow the ballot paper to show the order in which the parties choose to rank their candidates?

Sir Norman Fowler: The Government rebuffed the right hon. Gentleman, as he well knows. In debates since then on the open list, the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have consistently voted with the

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Government—although, in fact, they are still arguing in favour of the open list. That is what I find so odd about the Liberal Democrats' position.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): It is realistic politics.

Sir Norman Fowler: Oh. It is "realistic politics." My advice to the Liberal Democrats is to get off their knees and vote for what they think is right. They might get further and they would certainly win more respect.

I am not impressed by the Home Secretary's views, or by his attack on the House of Lords—which I gather he also carried out on lunchtime radio. In my view, the House of Lords has done a substantial public service. The Government's proposed closed-list system has few friends and, frankly, the House of Lords is right to challenge it.

Personally, I would advise the Home Secretary to be cautious in his argument about hereditary peers as compared with life peers. I notice that one of the life peers faithfully voting for the measure was his friend Lord Warner, who was a special adviser to the Home Secretary. It is not instantly evident why putting placemen in the Lords is a better way of arranging this country's affairs, nor do I think that simply turning the House of Lords into a giant quango is a change that many people will respect. I promise the Home Secretary that we will come back to that subject.

It is not just the House of Lords which backs the open list against a closed list. The Electoral Reform Society has said that a closed-list system is

"bad for voters, bad for candidates and bad for democracy."

Charter 88 says that

"we believe that voters should be able to choose between candidates of the same party."

Lord Jenkins—a marvellous man, whom both sides can quote to their advantage in the same debate—said that it would be an argument against any new system if

"any candidate, by gaining party machine endorsement for being at the head of a list, were to achieve a position of effective immunity from the preference of the electorate."

That seems to be a powerful case, and obviously the view of Lord Jenkins—the Prime Minister's adviser—will count heavily with Labour Members, given the affection in which Lord Jenkins is obviously held by them.

I do not believe that any sensible, objective observer believes that the Home Secretary has made his case. The more the public understand what is being proposed, the more the opposition to the Home Secretary's proposal is likely to grow. We do not support the Government amendment, which is not intended as a serious response to the vote in the other place and answers none of the points raised there, or indeed, here.

The amendment makes no sense even in its own terms. The Government promise a review of the workings of the closed list, but only after the election has taken place. That cannot be a sensible answer to the arguments, and it does not remotely satisfy the concern that the measure is anti-democratic and would deprive the public of a choice that should be theirs.

We do not want a review of a voting system that is obviously flawed. We want the Government to drop their opposition and to concede that an open-list system is a better way to conduct the European elections. That is what the public want and what the House should vote for.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am not in favour of the closed-list system, I have never voted for it and I do not intend to do so tonight. However, in a contest between the two Houses it would be inconsistent for me to argue that the views of the House of Lords should prevail over those of the Commons. Although I will not be in the Lobby tonight, I believe that where there is such a contest it is right and proper for the elected Chamber to have its way. It would be inconsistent with all that I have said about the other place for me to argue differently.

Nevertheless, I am not persuaded that the closed-list system is desirable or democratic. In fact, it is heavy in democratic deficit. I listened carefully to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, which was persuasive. If a good case could be made for the system, he undoubtedly made it, but I do not accept the premise of his argument in the first place. Lord Evans has been quoted in this debate and, like him, I have great admiration for the Home Secretary. I do not say that so as to stand a reasonable chance of getting to a higher place should there ever be a ranking system for election to Westminster. I have a genuine admiration for my right hon. Friend and I hope that I will not make him blush when I say that he is one of the best Home Secretaries that we have had in the post-war period. However, that does not mean that he is always right and I believe that he happens to be wrong today.

The ranking system is undesirable, despite all that my right hon. Friend has said. There is a difference between the way in which we are selected as parliamentary candidates for the Labour party and the way in which the system would operate for the coming European elections. We have been selected by the local party membership, with no intervention—as far as I know—by party headquarters or the regional office, and in my case that is just as well. The closed-list system, which would rank people first, second, third or fourth, is different. The choice may be made democratically and fairly and those deciding the ranking may well consider gender and ethnic minorities, which is desirable, but it is important not only that the system should be fair but that it should be seen to be fair.

Undoubtedly, there is a feeling in various regions that people have been placed at a disadvantage—they have been placed well down the ranking system not because they have done a bad job as Labour Members of the European Parliament but because their views have been unorthodox. One case has been cited. It has been said that that person has been ranked low because, about two years ago, she committed the cardinal sin of signing a newspaper advertisement that stated that the old clause 4 of the Labour party constitution should be retained. Some people may criticise her for that, but my own view is that it is not an offence for which she should go before the international war crimes tribunal.

If that MEP has been criticised for placing such an advertisement and has therefore been ranked low—that may not be the reason—so that her chances of being re-elected are that much smaller, I wonder about my own position. I not only may have signed an advertisement

about that clause: I argued for it—and I think I won the day—at the 1994 party conference. *[Interruption.]* I do not know what the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) is muttering, but it may not be complimentary.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that an open-list system has all sorts of disadvantages. It will come as no surprise to those who know my views that I am not in favour of proportional representation. If the closed-list system is an example of PR, let us hope that we never have it for elections to Westminster. For one reason or another, a commitment to proportional representation was in our manifesto. If we are to have PR, with all its disadvantages, we should nevertheless have an open system. If the Government are saying that that is not possible and that there is no point in pursuing that line of thought, what is the purpose of the review? Admittedly, it is to be held after the European elections next year, but surely it is intended to reconsider the matter and, if there is no purpose in that, there is no point in having a review.

During our last debate on the Bill, I said that this is an on-going controversy. It will not go away. The system will come into operation—unless the Lords decide that they will not accept the Government's proposal. If they do not accept it, we will be in a totally different situation. We are all aware of the Parliament Act, the 12 months' delay and all the rest, but as I said the views of the elected Chamber should prevail.

I hesitate to speak for my hon. Friends, but it is doubtful—I shall put it no higher than that—that a majority of the parliamentary Labour party is in favour of the closed-list system. The Liberal Democrats are in favour and in the other place Lord Evans said that they were happy to go along with the proposal because they will have PR.

8.15 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Hon. Members will be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman say that a majority of the Labour party are not in favour of the closed list. It follows that there is not a majority in the House in favour of the proposal. If that is the case, why is the hon. Gentleman unhappy about the other place insisting on its view?

Mr. Winnick: My answer is simple and I thought I had made my reasoning clear. In a contest between the two Houses, the views of the elected Chamber should prevail.

Mr. Hogg: They are not the views of the elected Chamber.

Mr. Winnick: If the Government get a majority tonight, which they undoubtedly will, whatever the private views of the majority of my colleagues, that is how the House operates. That was true for the poll tax. The majority of Tory Members may well not have been in favour of that tax, but the Government had their way. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) voted for the tax when he was a member of that Government.

In conclusion, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will bear these words in mind, the Labour party has a long tradition of favouring every form of democracy, not least internal democracy. I do not want to antagonise Conservative Members since they have probably agreed with me, but the Conservative party did not even get around to electing its leader until 1965, following an election defeat. We have elected people to national and local party posts from the very beginning. Whatever blemishes the Labour party has and whatever criticisms could be made against it, it is a democratic party and it saddens me that we do not have tonight the most powerful case on this issue. Although the European elections will almost certainly go ahead under the closed-list system, I must tell my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that I hope that his review will be no charade. It must not be a means of saying that as there is a row, we must satisfy the other House.

Many of us are deeply uneasy about a system that gives too much authority to people in a party who have not necessarily been elected. It gives too much authority to people who will be able to decide whether or not a particular candidate's views are orthodox. That is not democratic, and it is therefore impossible for me to support the Government in the Division Lobby tonight.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) has made us a seductive offer in asking us to join the Conservatives in sustaining the amendments proposed by their hereditary peers. We confess openly that we are caught between a rock and a hard place. We have stated our support for the single transferable vote system used in Northern Ireland, which is the best possible form of proportional representation. During the early stages of the Bill, we also argued for an open-list system along the lines of the Belgian model, and that led to a vote in June, to which I am sure Conservative Members will refer, and which was lost in the other place by 15 votes as it did not have the support of the same Conservative peers who turned out to support the amendment that we are discussing now.

There are three paths before us. First, we could proceed with the closed-list system and the review, as the Government suggest. Secondly, we could reach agreement on the open-list system proposed by the Conservatives, with all the problems that that would entail. Thirdly, we could fail to resolve the dispute so that the Bill runs into the buffers at the end of the Session. I am pleased that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has come out as an overt and unashamed first-past-the-poster, because the debate should be seen in the light of that fact. We believe that every Conservative Member, and most Conservative peers, would prefer the third option—the buffers—rather than the other two more desirable options. We could then return to a closed-list system of one, as the Home Secretary elegantly described the first-past-the-post system. As the debate has proceeded, more and more light has come from the Home Secretary, and more understanding of our criticisms over many years of the current system.

The open-list system proposed by the Conservatives suffers several problems. It has a certain arbitrariness, particularly if it means that people are simply listed alphabetically, which would give highly random results. As my name begins with A, I should be all right, but I might find that aspiring young politicians were changing their name to Mr. or Ms Aardvark. The alphabetical soup of selection that might result is a substantial problem.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has pointed out the further problem that it would theoretically be possible

[Mr. Richard Allan]

under the Conservative system for someone to be elected without any votes at all. If a single popular candidate received all the votes for his party, but that party received a substantial chunk of the total vote, some of the candidate's votes would be distributed to other candidates who had received no votes. The Belgian system seems preferable to that Finnish system with all its vagaries.

It is increasingly common to hear phrases such as "d'Hondt divisor" or "Sainte-Lague divisor" tripping from the tongues of Conservative Members. However, their background in proposing constitutional reform is not strong. The proposed closed-list system meets one—but only one—of our two objectives, which is that it would secure fairer representation so that every voter in the United Kingdom would have a vote that counted. Our second objective, however, is an increase in voter choice, and the closed-list system fails to take us closer to achieving that. All that can be said is that the proposals do not take us back to the closed-list system of one that exists under the first-past-the-post system, which is, in principle, equivalent to the system that would operate under the proposed closed-list system.

Hon. Members have asked what happens to people at the bottom of party lists. Under current procedures for choosing candidates for Westminster constituencies, those who come second or third in selection battles are denied any ability to put themselves forward to the voters. The arguments of the Conservatives have not seduced us into voting with the Tories tonight. Two parties stood for election on 1 May 1997 on the clear platform of pressing for fairer votes in the European elections. Those two parties secured about 60 per cent. of the vote, and that is a significant mandate. We feel anger and resentment at seeing the single party that tried to resist change at the general election continue to propagate its resistance through hereditary peers who have never stood for election.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting case with which I disagree. The Conservatives lost about 4.5 million votes at the general election, for a wide variety of reasons. Why did the Liberal Democrat party lose 800,000 votes—quite a crash—if its policies were so popular?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not discussing any party's policy tonight.

Mr. Allan: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for preventing me from entering a debate into which I did not want to go and which would not be germane to the subject in hand.

Sixty per cent. of the electorate voted in favour of fair votes for the European election. A much smaller proportion voted against. Several of the smaller parties, such as the nationalist parties, shared our platform. We have a clear mandate, and the other place goes against that mandate at its peril in seeking to advance retention of the first-past-the-post system.

I have listened with interest to Labour Members. I do not seek to intrude on private grief, except to say that much of the criticism of the closed-list system is not criticism of the system in principle but of the practice used by Labour in implementing it. The debate within the Labour party has saddened us. It does a disservice to PR in general when the public see Labour Members pulling each other apart over a system that the Liberal Democrats would not adopt. Our members would not have the closed-list system, and they would turf us out if we tried to introduce such a candidate selection process. Our party rightly demands one member, one-vote, and that is what happens in our selection process.

Labour's selection battles have done a disservice to the closed-list system. The system itself takes us no further back, but to accept it would be to miss an opportunity to extend voter choice. The Conservatives offer no such opportunity by introducing tonight's debate at such a late stage in the Bill's proceedings. The European elections will not give us all that we want. We would have liked to extend voter choice, and we shall press that point when we come to the review. However, we shall support the Government tonight to bring in the closed-list system now before we move on to argue our case at the review. Warm and welcoming though the offer was that we should join Conservative Members, we believe that they are clinging to an outmoded system that would deny UK electors the real worth of their votes next June. We do not support that system, and that is why we shall support the Government.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) argued, with good grounds, that there is no majority in favour of the closed-list system in the parliamentary Labour party. Yet, he also argued that the Government would have a large majority tonight. I ask the House to think about that contradiction. If there is no majority in the Labour party, but the system is such that the Whips and the Patronage Secretary can dragoon Members through the Lobby—and I admit that I will be dragooned when the time comes—what legitimacy does the elected Chamber have in comparison with the unelected Chamber whose Members may, by and large, vote according to their own judgment on the right course of action for the country?

Mr. Hogg: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a second difference? In the other place, most Lords actually listen to debate, but we will have a Government majority although there are no more than about six Labour Members in the Chamber at the moment.

Dr. Marek: I understand what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying, although I would not entirely go along with it because I am often working in my room with the new television system on, so I listen to many of the debates without being seen in the Chamber that often. Under the present system and the way in which we organise the House of Commons, it is not necessarily always right to say that the elected Chamber is superior to the unelected Chamber and must prevail.

I, too, have the highest regard and great admiration for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. He is often right, but on this occasion he is not. He has got it wrong. This policy was decided not by any vote within the parliamentary Labour party; it came down from on high, from the leadership, that there would be a closed list. Something may have been said about receiving opinion. It certainly received my opinion, but to no avail; we still have a closed list. There is no democratic system within

the Labour party for deciding by discussion and a vote whether an issue such as this should go one way or the other.

Mr. Grieve: Would the hon. Gentleman care to enlighten the House as to any reason that he can think of why the diktat came down from on high in the way that it did?

8.30 pm

Dr. Marek: I shall not be sidetracked. Clearly there are issues central to Government policy where the Government will have to say that if we want them to govern, we have to support them. But my contention is that this is not an issue where the Government have to pronounce what they want and how they intend to achieve it and then use the Whips to dragoon their side through the Lobbies. This would have been an excellent example of where we could have had options A, B and C and a free vote of the House. I do not see what difference that would have made to the Government. We could have had the Belgian system, the House of Lords' system and the Home Secretary's closed-list system, and we would have had a much fuller House. The House would have been packed if we had had three options. That was done in the previous Parliament and it could have been done in this Parliament. It would make the House a better place if we empowered Members on both sides to use their judgment rather than be dragooned through the Lobbies.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary put forward a few arguments. He said that the authority of the House must prevail over the other place, then 10 minutes later he said that the Government consider that the closed-list system is right. He cannot have it both ways. It is perfectly right to argue the case as a member of the Government. I would have been happier if he had done so, having at least obtained the vote within the parliamentary Labour party. That is what happens in countries such as Australia and New Zealand. In most Commonwealth countries such matters go to a particular caucus. I do not know what happens in the Conservative party, but they do not go to any caucus in this party. However, my right hon. Friend cannot claim in aid the authority of the House and his authority as a member of the Government.

My right hon. Friend talked about the closed-list system of one. I thought that I was elected by an open-list system of one. It could have been ordered in any particular way. It was a list of one and it was completely open. Is my right hon. Friend trying to pull the wool over our eyes? Have I been labouring under a delusion? I have always thought that it was an open list; if people did not want to vote for me, they did not have to. If I am wrong in that logic, perhaps my right hon. Friend or the Under-Secretary will intervene and put me right. At the moment, I do not think that they intend to do that.

The last bit of obfuscation that we had from my right hon. Friend was that open-list systems are complicated and the British people are too stupid to understand them and do not like them. We hear that from all those who have an unsound case and want to pull the wool over people's eyes. It is not true. There are systems whereby one can vote for a particular party on the top row, and then have the opportunity to order candidates if one so wishes.

I think that I could have lived with the closed-list system if my own party's procedures in selecting candidates had been open, above board and honest, but clearly they have failed to be so. For example, I took part in a vote, with many of my fellow members of the north Wales Labour party, for those whom we thought should be on the list for the Welsh constituency of five members. We voted for our sitting candidate, Mr. Wilson, by, I think, about 98 per cent., yet, at the last stage, after the matter went to Millbank tower, where heaven knows what happens, a candidate from across the border in England appears on our list in Wales in third position—*[Interruption.]* That is not a criticism; he could have been from Ethiopia. However, he came from outside the area; we in Wales had no knowledge that he was interested in being on the list in Wales; and he was not considered as one of those in contention for a place on the list by the Labour party members in north Wales. Yet there he is in third position and the candidate for whom 98 per cent. of Labour members in north Wales voted is in fourth position—an unlikely winning position for the Labour party in the elections.

That cannot be right. It is not open. There is no doubt about that. It is not democratic because 98 per cent. of Labour party members voted for somebody else. They did not vote for the candidate who was put in.

I fear that my party has sabotaged its argument for the closed-list system by the way in which it is selecting its candidates for the European elections. At the end of the day, if I have the choice, I am an open-list person.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with great interest. Would he demur from what the Home Secretary was saying earlier and agree that by far the most democratic selection of candidates in his area of Wales will have come from the Conservative party in Wales or any other region of the United Kingdom, where every member had an equal vote in the selection of those candidates? Does he agree that that is by far the most appropriate system?

Dr. Marek: I am reminded that my Conservative opponent joined the Labour party yesterday for other reasons to do with the Conservative party's inability to form an Opposition. I am sorry about that because it ought to form an Opposition on this. I do not wish to be rude, but simply putting one's head in the sand and saying that one is for first past the post or nothing is not the best way of opposing what I think is a sleight of hand on the part of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and his Front-Bench team.

I agree that the system should be one member, one vote. If new Labour means anything, it means one member, one vote. But my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) will tell the House that it is difficult to get one member, one vote in the election for Labour candidate for the National Assembly for Wales. Somehow or other, the Labour party, or at least Millbank tower, seems to think that new Labour and one member, one vote is all very well for certain things, such as getting rid of clause 4, but when it comes to electing the Labour candidate for the National Assembly for Wales, it is not the best system and we must consider all sorts of other possibilities.

[Dr. Marek]

The election that took place between my right hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West in the summer had, as one section of that electoral system—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr. Marek: Bear with me for 10 seconds, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I am talking about open and closed lists. That election had something called party units where members have two or three votes, which was not right.

At one end of the spectrum, open lists give electors as much access as possible so that they can distribute their votes between the candidates according to their individual judgment. At the other end, one member, one vote puts everybody on an equal basis, with no weighting between one set of electors and another. Unfortunately, the closed-list system allows fixers to get their way, which is the real reason why I oppose it. As there is no possibility of the Government not having their way this evening, I hope that they have listened to what I and other hon. Members have said and that, in the 24 hours or so that remain, they will do something to get this measure right.

Mr. Sayeed: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), for this debate is not about proportional representation, despite what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) said, or about the House of peers, as the Home Secretary implied. The right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is doubtless embarrassed to propose a system that most of his party thoroughly dislike. This debate is about the Government's decision to enact a system of closed lists, which shows a contempt for democracy and elevates the self-centred interests of the party machine above the wishes of the people.

In so doing, the Government misunderstand their duty. The duty of any Government is to look after the interests of the United Kingdom—which means everyone in the United Kingdom—not to look after the interests of the Labour party. We have seen examples of that in Scotland and Wales; in the fact that the Neill committee report appears to be cherry picked; in the debate on the House of Lords; and in the elections for a London mayor and a European Parliament. As the hon. Member for Wrexham made absolutely clear, there are different rules and interpretations of the rules by the Labour Government. The choices that they make are in the interests not of the country but solely of the Labour party. That is wrong.

If Ministers think that I am unfair, I ask them to consider this proposition. If a person in receipt of the Labour Whip, who was elected on a Labour manifesto, decided to stand for London or Wales and was the preferred choice of the Labour supporters in London or Wales, would the Labour party allow him, whether he was the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) or the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), to stand in the Labour interest? *[Interruption.]*

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), appears to be leaving the Chamber. I doubt that a Minister will answer that question, but the answer is probably that the executive of the Labour party, not Labour supporters, will decide who the candidate is.

Nothing more clearly shows the Government's determination to govern in the interests of party advantage than the shuttlecock passage of the Bill. Labour Members should not blame hereditary Conservative peers. It is worth repeating the words of the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). Lord Shore of Stepney, a Privy Councillor and for many years a Member of this House—highly respected, extraordinarily able and very honest—said:

"But the dangers of cronyism, patronage and corruption are obvious in a system which concentrates power in such an important area on so few people who are basically self-selected. These seem to me to be very powerful reasons why we should not have a list system at all and why we certainly should not have a closed list."

Lord Evans of Parkside said:

"There is little doubt so far as the Labour party is concerned that Labour candidates who are successfully elected to the European Parliament under this system will regard their responsibilities, so far as their future careers are concerned, to lie in obeying the demands and requirements of the National Executive Committee and the leadership of the party."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 October 1998; Vol. 593, c. 742-44.]

Mr. Allan: I do not wish to detract from the hon. Gentleman's arguments, which are a fair criticism of the way in which the Labour party has operated over selection, but does he agree that the same criticisms could be levelled against the Westminster selection system if the national executive committee of the Labour party or any other party chose to impose candidates in the same way? The problem is not the principle of closed lists but the way in which the Labour party has operated that system. That is not a PR issue.

8.45 pm

Mr. Sayeed: The way in which the Labour party will operate the closed-list system is utterly objectionable and extraordinarily undemocratic. Most Labour Members believe that as well; I only wish that they would show it in their votes. There are profound objections to the closed list per se, but the way in which the Labour party is operating it is the worst of all worlds.

Lord Stoddart, referring to the Lords amendments, said:

"What the amendments seek to achieve is to give the electorate a voice in who is elected to the European Parliament".

It is clear and simple—it is called democracy. A Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Russell, said:

"The basic point is that democracy involves the right to choose both what party and what person will represent us".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 October 1998; Vol. 593, c. 1323-28.]

Not one of those speakers in the other place was a Conservative, and only one—the Liberal Democrat—was a hereditary peer, yet their views are clear: they are against the closed list, particularly the way in which the Labour party intends to operate it.

Mr. Robathan: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is depressing that Liberal Democrats in this place now kowtow so much to the Government that they will support them this evening, whereas some of their noble Friends are willing to stand up for their consciences and principles?

Mr. Sayeed: It may be disappointing, but it is not surprising.

Organisations outside this place are interested in democracy as well, although they may not be keen on my party. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield has already quoted the Electoral Reform Society, which said of the closed-list system:

"It is bad for voters, bad for candidates and bad for democracy."

Charter 88 said:

"We believe that voters should be able to choose between candidates of the same party. We are especially concerned that voters are not given the impression that the new voting system is being introduced for party political benefit".

It went on to say:

"We are concerned that if the government insist on the use of closed lists voters may be left with the impression that the voting system has been manipulated for party political aims".

If we continue with a closed-list system, voters would be right to believe that.

We must not leave out Lord Jenkins. I was interested to see how partial the Home Secretary's quotes were. I should like to give him one back, which supports the arguments that I have been making and that some of my hon. Friends will make.

Paragraph 138 of the Jenkins report states:

"Under a reform system it is crucial that the voters' right to express their view of individual candidates should be at least maintained and preferably enhanced."

Jenkins goes on:

"It would be a count against a new system if any candidate, by gaining party machine endorsement for being at the head of a list, were to achieve a position of effective immunity from the preference of the electorate. This is the essence of the case for open as opposed to closed lists".

I disagree with most of Lord Jenkins's report, but a phrase or two is rather good. That is one of them.

Lord Jenkins makes most elegantly the case against closed lists, which is simply that the person who is selected is selected by the party. Under the Labour operation of the closed list, the person who is selected is selected by the party machine. Therefore, that party clone will not be responsible to the electorate and will not have to take the will of the electorate into account; he will have only to keep the party bosses sweet.

We Conservative Members who believe that it should be our country first, our constituency second and our party last believe that a Government who operate so undemocratically and in a way that is so contemptuous of democracy should have any such proposal defeated. The Lords amendment should stand.

Mrs. Gorman: It is difficult to speak after the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). His honest description of what goes on in the Labour party was a most amazing insight into the true workings of the Government party and the way in which it seeks to control every aspect of the administration of its party affairs. A spillover of that into the way in which people are able to show their support for individual candidates is a serious matter for us all.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) of course touched his forelock to the Home Secretary, as is often the way of those on the Back Benches, and told us what a wonderful fellow he is, but his presentation bordered almost on megalomania at times. It was, "Ve vill haf vays of making you vote." The system seems to be, "You vill get no choice of candidate." That is far from being a reputable performance from the Home Secretary.

Even when there were many more Labour Members in the Chamber than at present, the Home Secretary was unable to get a single supporter from his own side. He had possibly one watery supporter, but most Labour Members are obviously strongly opposed. I applaud them for that, because we all know that that will not do their career prospects a great deal of good.

If we want to know what is really happening, we can pray in aid the situation in Wales, which has already been well described, and let us not forget London, where another candidate, who is apparently not looked on particularly favourably by the Labour Administration, is struggling to become a Labour candidate. Those difficulties are not present in the Conservative party. For that reason—although we deplore the proposed system—we are in favour of open lists.

Labour Members suggested that we were inconsistent because we favour a closed, one member voting arrangement for the parliamentary elections, but they destroyed their own argument. As they pointed out, the member who emerges as a candidate for the parliamentary election goes through a democratic primary—certainly in the Conservative party, where all members of an association choose from a variety of candidates. Any member of the public is welcome to join the Conservative party and take part in that process. For the Home Secretary to pray in aid that argument in an attempt to denigrate the principled position taken by Conservative Members is simply nonsense. It does not hold water, even with his own Back Benchers.

The Home Secretary went on—this was very disturbing—to complain bitterly that the public do not turn out to vote in European elections. In my view of democracy, people have the right to vote for "none of the above". If they regard an election as irrelevant to their life style, or as something that they deplore, absence from the voting booth is itself a public demonstration of their attitude to the institution that they are being asked to support.

I do not, as the Home Secretary seems to do, denigrate people's unwillingness to come out and vote. I wish that the right hon. Gentleman he had shown a little more courtesy, and shown less arrogance and a less patronising attitude, towards the voters of this country, but I do not need to touch my forelock to him, because he is not likely to affect my promotion chances. [HON. MEMBERS: "What chances?"] Indeed, I am a demonstration of the fact that this democratic party tolerates the dissident voice on certain matters. Here I am in the Chamber, strongly supporting the case that was made earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler).

There is not much to add after the demonstration and the remarks from Labour Members, except to mention the Liberal Democrats and their love affair with Brussels. Brussels makes decent truffles, but I do not know what else it does, except deal in the most ludicrous political trifles. For the Liberal Democrats to pray them in aid tells us how much notice we need to take of that party.

I hope that the Home Secretary will think again, because he is showing contempt for the democratic process—not only to the electorate, but to those within his party and in the other place. For him to suggest that

[Mrs. Gorman]

the life peers—large numbers of whom have recently been placed in the Lords under the patronage of the Prime Minister in a manner that would have made Lloyd George blush—are an alternative to the present system is a travesty.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Government have created a chimera in the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, which they will come to regret. We are not considering a choice between the status quo and an alternative, but a choice between the closed and open-list systems. The problem is that both systems will alienate the electorate, and will have the effect of lowering the already low turnout for European elections. Both systems are less democratic than the present system.

The Home Secretary proudly came to the House tonight with the announcement that this time it would be all right to overrule the Lords amendments, because he intended to have a review. When I asked him on what criteria the review would be based, he would not answer me. Will it be a 30, 25 or 20 per cent. turnout? Will it be on the basis that the closed system will result in the election of more Labour MEPs than the open system? We do not know, because he has not told us. The closed system concentrates power in the hands of the Executive even more than the present system.

What will happen if a Labour MEP elected under the closed system dies or resigns? The electorate will not decide the alternative: someone else on the Labour list will be substituted. What is to prevent pressure from being put on a wayward Labour MEP who does not conform to Labour party policy to resign, so that someone else can be put in his place? What is to prevent the Labour party executive from downgrading people such as Christine Oddy, whom my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) mentioned, so that they are so far down the list that they will never be elected?

The closed-list system concentrates huge power in the hands of the Labour party executive. That cannot be democratic. The closed-list system is secretive: we do not know what is going on in the minds of the electorate.

The Home Secretary said that the public in large Euro-constituencies would be confused by ballot papers with a huge number of names. That is extremely patronising. The electorate will certainly be able to make a choice under an open system and to decide for themselves whom they want to elect.

Mr. Sayeed: The Home Secretary has obviously never seen a ballot paper in India. Ballot papers in India, where most of the populace cannot read and write, sometimes have 14 or 15 names. There are symbols for the candidates. The Indian people manage to vote, and they do so in large numbers. In the United States, the ballot papers have a long list of names. My hon. Friend is right to say that it shows great contempt for the electorate in this country to suggest that they cannot deal with large ballot papers.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend that the Labour party is contemptuous of the electorate, as it has been on the other constitutional changes that it has proposed. One day, the electorate will wake up and chuck out the Government for that very reason.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) has whistle-blown in no uncertain terms. He has clearly shown us how the Labour party will operate in its selection of candidates under a closed list. It is secretive and undemocratic. It is trying to prevent the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) from becoming the prime candidate in Wales, and it is trying to prevent candidates from being selected for the post of Lord Mayor and for the European Parliament. It is a control freak to the highest degree.

As for the Liberal Democrats, they have no principles whatever. In their desire to gain Cabinet seats, they are facing both ways, as they do time and again. Men of principle in the other House are prepared to say what they think and to vote the way they think. In this House, Liberal Democrats say one thing and vote differently.

Mr. Allan: We have expressed our firm view that we want fair votes for the European elections. We are working on the basis of that principle, but we take a pragmatic view of the fact that we have 46 Members of Parliament and we do not yet form the Government.

9 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If the way in which Liberal Democrats vote is based on the fact that they have only 46 Members of Parliament, I invite them permanently to vote with the Opposition and they may see some worthwhile change. We do not know which way they will vote on any particular issue. I have no doubt that some of them will vote one way this evening, and some will vote a different way—we shall see.

The Government have not given us a real choice. Unfortunately, they do not intend to have a proper review of the election next June, so that they can decide whether the open or the closed-list system has worked or is likely to work, and if not, whether it would be desirable to go back to the first-past-the-post system. If they want to keep a genuinely open mind—

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give way to my neighbour in a minute. He should not get so excited.

The Labour party should keep a genuinely open mind on this matter. The Home Secretary has made it clear that any change to the system would require legislation, so it would require legislation to change from a closed to an open-list system or to change back to the first-past-the-post system. The matter would have to come back to the House and the other place for a change in the primary legislation. Why can the Minister and his hon. Friends not tell us this evening why there cannot be an open review of the operation of the system next June?

Mr. Drew *rose—*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I will give way to my next-door neighbour.

Mr. Drew: I honestly do not understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The whole point of the proposal is that it gives the opportunity for a full review. That was said on Second Reading, and is now explicit in the House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is a question for the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the Under-Secretary, to answer

later. I understood from what the Home Secretary said in opening the debate that the option of the first-past-the-post system was not to be considered under the review. If I have misunderstood the system, no doubt the Minister will either intervene now or, when he winds up, make the position entirely clear. The electorate deserve to know.

Is the Minister going to intervene? If not, we must assume that we do not have a full and open review, and that the first-past-the-post system will not be an option.

In short, what we are asked to decide on this evening is a pig in a poke. The electorate will have their say. I believe that next June's elections will be a thorough muddle, and I hope that one day my own party, when re-elected, will consider changing the system back.

Mr. Lansley: I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who eloquently presented some of the difficulties posed by the Government's proposals.

In a sense, the debate differs from our earlier debate on this House's disagreement with a Lords amendment. The Government are now proposing an amendment in lieu. Nevertheless, the motion strikes me as a transparent effort to cause their Lordships to change their minds about an important amendment that they have tabled, and I think that it has much more shadow than substance. Effectively, by virtue of the review, the Government are merely setting out to say to the Lords, "Give us an excuse to move from your resistance to the closed-list system."

As was made clear in the opening exchanges with the Home Secretary, the review itself could not give rise to a change in a subsequent electoral system, except by virtue of future primary legislation. The Home Secretary said, in response to an intervention, that, if there were a need for a review, it would arise from great public anxiety about the result.

The issue is this. Must we go through the process of an election through a closed-list system, with all the difficulties that will ensue when voters go into the polling booth and are presented with a ballot paper that gives them no opportunity to choose between candidates standing for a party? I confidently predict that there will be a great deal of public anxiety after that; but we have to have a review, and the prospect of taking on the burden of primary legislation, in order to make a change.

I know, and the Government know perfectly well in their heart of hearts, that the process of securing primary legislation is long and difficult, as the Bill amply demonstrates. They will not readily concede that, and—as I am sure Ministers, in their hearts, understand—they are not contemplating changing the electoral system after the European parliamentary elections next June; they are merely offering a device through which they can continue to send the proposals back to the Lords. This is not a realistic review. In truth, we are thrown back on arguments that have been rehearsed here previously, and have been amply argued in another place: the arguments for a closed list and for an open list.

When I read the debate that took place in the Lords last Wednesday, I see that their lordships did us the service of reading carefully the arguments presented in the House of Commons. Lord Shore explicitly said that he had looked carefully at what the Home Secretary had had to say before, to see whether there was a new argument that would justify his changing his mind. He did not find one then, and I submit that he will not find one when he comes to read this debate.

We should examine very carefully the Home Secretary's arguments in favour of the closed-list system. Even in our earlier debates, the right hon. Gentleman has got away with a few arguments that he should not have got away with. Let me take the first one, which I think is the most important. On that occasion, and on previous occasions, the Home Secretary has argued that a perverse result can arise from the open-list system—that it is possible for someone to be elected with fewer preferences than someone who is not elected. It is undeniably true that, statistically that can occur. However, two arguments wholly countermand the Home Secretary's argument. The first is this. In the open-list system, we can at least see what the preferences of voters are as between the individual candidates of a party.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Within a party.

Mr. Lansley: Within a party. My hon. Friend rightly corrects me. In a closed-list system, we cannot see what the voters' preferences are between candidates within a party. Therefore, some highly perverse results may occur under a closed-list system: candidates may be elected who are deeply unpopular with the voters who support a given party. Indeed, the arguments that we have been hearing from hon. Members in previous debates suggest that that may be the case—what the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) referred to as the Mickey Finn slipped into the system is precisely that sort of person. However, it is important that we understand that the closed-list system, far from being without perverse results, simply hides the perverse result.

Mr. Swayne: Will my hon. Friend accept that, although it is not an edifying sport, the British electorate like to pick off unpopular candidates in an election?

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that he is right. He may want to elaborate exactly that point.

The second point is that the fact that, under an open-list system, a candidate with relatively few preferences might get elected, arises from the fact that another candidate on that same party's list attracts a large number of preferences. We are dealing with a proportional system. I am not here arguing the merits or otherwise of a proportional system, but it is a proportional system. The Home Secretary argues that most voters are guided by party rather than personality, as it were—that they vote for party first. Indeed, it will be true that, by some mechanism, under an open-list system, the parties will contrive to present perhaps well-known candidates, or candidates to whom they give the greater part of their publicity, and that there will be a candidate on that party's list who secures the greater number of preferences. It may be a much greater number than some other candidates on the rest of that party's list.

Out of the fact of proportionality, arises the fact that that party has to attract a certain number of seats. It may be that individual preferences within that party for that candidate are relatively few, but the fact that that party attracts a large number of votes gives the reason why it

[Mr. Lansley]

attracts that seat, so the result is not wholly perverse. The individual preferences for a less preferred candidate on a party's list would not necessarily lead voters to conclude that another candidate on another party's list is in fact preferred to someone who has relatively few preferences within the list of the party to which they subscribe.

I am sorry that that is a slightly elaborate argument, but I see that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) at least understands my point. Therefore, it seems that the first and, in fact, most often repeated argument that the Home Secretary has presented against an open list is not a good argument.

The second argument that the Home Secretary now presents is that to change would be disruptive. He will know that party machines often try to persuade one that to change things, especially to change things when they have started down a particular track, is highly undesirable. The more determined a party machine is to have its way, the more likely it is to argue that to change now would be disruptive.

The fact is that party machines can be surprisingly flexible when the occasion demands. The last thing that we should do is to change the view of what is the most acceptable electoral system by the standards of the voters just to meet the demands of party machines that find it inconvenient at a late stage to move from this proposed system to another one. It is perfectly clear what voters would prefer. Way back in February, the Electoral Reform Society undertook some research with the McDougall Trust. The findings showed that

"although voters claim to vote on the basis of a party, they react strongly to the removal of the right to select a candidate for themselves."

9.15 pm

The Home Secretary said that voting for a party is not an alien system—in a sense he is right because most voters choose a party—but not to have an opportunity to vote for a candidate of choice is an alien system in this country. Let me repeat a point that I made during a previous debate on the subject: for voters to be presented with a choice of party but not the ability to vote for the candidate whom they recognise as a personality seeking their vote, is an alien system. The divorcing of candidate from party would be new and would be regarded as wholly undesirable by the electorate. So the argument about disruption is not true.

Other hon. Members have rightly said, that to argue that voters would be confused, and the way in which they cast their vote arbitrary, is dismissive of voters' behaviour. In fact it is wrong because, if an open list demands it, party systems will be extremely good at presenting the electorate with information about candidates. As it happens, that is an argument for an open list. Under a closed list, one has to tell the voters not about the candidates, but only about the party. Under an open list, one has to tell voters about candidates and give them information. There may be a relatively small turnout at a European election, but it is likely to be an informed turnout. Voters are more likely to be informed of the respective merits of candidates under an open-list system.

If those arguments do not have credibility as the reasons for the Home Secretary's opposition to an open-list system, what is it all about? Hon. Members have made it clear—I agree with them—that it is all about reasserting the control of the party machine over the outcome of the election. The voters who support the Labour party are not to be given an opportunity to substitute their choice for the choice of the party machine in Millbank tower. That is what it is all about. The other arguments do not sustain the Home Secretary's opposition to an open-list system. That is the only rationale for persisting in the self-evidently misjudged proposal for a closed-list system. The Labour party's machinations, its outrageous system for the selection of candidates and its manipulation of the closed-list system bring into disrepute the Home Secretary's proposal, and the House would be wise to reject it.

Mr. Swayne: I always find the Home Secretary persuasive and I found him so again this evening. Particularly persuasive was his argument that this is all a question of horses for courses. There is something to be said for the horse that he has selected for this course.

I come to the argument from a slightly different point of view. I remember the time in 1975 when Roy Jenkins, as he then was, said that it was inconceivable that we would have direct elections to the European Parliament. I found some comfort in that. I have difficulty with the concept of a European Parliament as I have never felt that there was a European people for that Parliament to represent. It struck me that there was something eminently sensible about the system of nominating representatives to the European Assembly. There is something attractive, therefore, about the closed-list system proposed by the Home Secretary because it is almost a return to a system of nominating delegates.

We come to the Bill late in the day and we have to accept most of it as we find it. Although we are given a certain latitude with the amendment before us, the rest of the Bill remains the same. Part of that is the absurdly large constituencies which, in my case, involves a constituency stretching from the Isle of Wight to Milton Keynes. I appreciate the amount of chaos—if, indeed, it is possible to measure chaos—mentioned by the Home Secretary. However, what of the chaos of having 11 Conservative candidates in the election in my region, campaigning against one another to secure a higher preference?

The Home Secretary's arguments were persuasive, but not quite persuasive enough. We have to weigh against the Home Secretary's arguments the corrosive and corrupting effect of centralising power under political parties—something that has been drawn to our attention, in a most staggering way, in both this debate and last week's debate, by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). Selection of candidates for the election has been a quite extraordinary process. The House owes Labour party members another opportunity to be liberated from the tyranny that they have imposed upon themselves in Wales, in London and in arrangements for the European elections.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: And in Scotland.

Mr. Swayne: Indeed, and in Scotland. However, I shall confine myself to the matter that we are debating.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said, in his most recent report, Lord Jenkins drew attention to the matter of open and

closed lists. It is all very well for the Home Secretary to go on, as he has today, rubbishing an open-list system. However, in his report, Lord Jenkins was quite clear on the distinction between open and closed lists. On page 41, he said:

"It would be a count against a new system if any candidate, by gaining party machine endorsement for being at the head of a list, were to achieve a position of effective immunity from the preference of the electorate. This is the essence of the case for open as opposed to closed lists".

Lord Jenkins may have written his report with Westminster elections in mind, but there is no reason why the report's principles should not apply as much to Westminster elections as to European parliamentary elections. I reject the report in total. I am not in favour of the Jenkins report. Nevertheless, I am absolutely certain that Lord Jenkins was right in his preference for open over closed lists.

A hugely important principle is at stake. Although the Home Secretary's arguments were persuasive, they failed to persuade us that a dreadful precedent will not be set in using closed lists in democratic elections. Closed lists abolish completely any concept of representative democracy. How can one possibly have a representative whom one has not specifically voted for or against? Representative democracy is posited on the existence of candidates on a list, and to do away with candidates in closed lists is to do away with representative democracy.

There is some merit in the argument that there will be chaos in huge constituencies in which candidates from the same party compete against one another. An equally powerful case could be made that political parties—in the views that they are expressing on the issue that will be addressed next June—are not entirely consistent and homogenous within themselves. The Conservative party has a number of views on the future of the European Union. I am glad to say also that democracy is not dead among Labour Members, who still offer a variety of views on the matter. It is therefore entirely appropriate that people should be able to select candidates on the basis of how close a candidate's view is to their own. There will undoubtedly be candidates who are particularly enthusiastic about the current development of the European Union, just as there are candidates who are unenthusiastic about it. It is entirely appropriate that those candidates should make their opinions known and should seek votes accordingly. I suspect that that will do much more for voter turnout than denying voters a choice would.

Mr. Allan: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he is now a convert from the first-past-the-post system, whereby the voter has no choice but simply has to accept a Euro-sceptic, a Europhile or whichever single candidate is presented by each party?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has strayed outside the terms of the amendment. I hope that the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) will not follow him.

Mr. Swayne: I should dearly love to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) down that track, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but of course I shall not. I admitted that the Home Secretary was persuasive in many respects, but, in spite of that, the case for open democracy—within the parties and, beyond, to the electorate—has been made very clearly. The House should agree with the Lords in their amendment.

Mr. Clappison: The Home Secretary said that we were going over well-trodden ground. That may be so, but the debate has reflected the widespread concern about the course that the Government are following, and their choice as between open and closed lists.

Once again, there has been no support, from any corner of the House, for the principle of the closed list. There was no support for it in the interventions or the substantive speeches of Labour Members. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) once again made it clear that he does not support the principle of a closed list. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), in what the House will agree was a highly principled speech, expressed the unease that he and many colleagues feel. He spoke for many people when he put the issue in the context of other changes that are taking place.

We also heard excellent speeches from various Conservative Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) made a cogent and well-researched speech, and was right to draw attention to the authoritative voices that have spoken out against the principle of the closed list. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made a reflective and closely argued speech, in which he demolished the Home Secretary's arguments. I shall deal with some of those arguments in a moment. We also heard excellent speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton–Brown), for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), who all spoke with real conviction.

It was ludicrous for the Home Secretary to suggest that the debate was got up by hereditary Conservative peers. It might be convenient and easy for the Home Secretary to take that line, but it does not do justice to the merits of the Lords amendment or to the principle at stake. The House of Lords has reflected the widespread concern that is felt not only in both Houses of Parliament but outside, by many organisations that are interested in electoral matters but which take no particular party line.

As the Home Secretary knows full well, the principle at stake is whether voters should have a choice of individual candidates, or whether only parties should appear on the ballot paper. It is unwise for him to keep on trying to demolish particular forms of the open list offered to the Government as variations.

At the beginning of the whole process, the Government had a choice. They had made a bald commitment to change the system, and had the choice of adopting an open or a closed-list system. The Government decided to go for a closed-list system, which was very instructive about their priorities. Since then, the Home Secretary has said that various systems are too difficult for us to understand. That is an insult to the House and the British people.

How is it that so many other countries in the European Union struggle along with an open-list system? Why is it that an open-list system is not invincibly difficult for voters in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy,

[Mr. Clappison]

Luxembourg and the Netherlands? Why is it that voters in those countries can cope with an open list, but voters in the United Kingdom cannot?

The Home Secretary tried to draw comfort from other countries in the European Union that have a closed list, but he will know that it is a different system from that proposed, as it operates at a national rather than regional level. The fact that the proposed system operates at a regional level makes it even more conducive to centralised party control.

Mr. Straw: How?

9.30 pm

Mr. Clappison: I refer the Home Secretary to the excellent work of the constitution unit. It makes it more difficult for smaller parties to stand, as they have to obtain a higher threshold of votes to achieve representation. A regional closed-list system is a double whammy for party control. That is what the debate is all about, as was made clear by the interventions that the Home Secretary took from the hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) and for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), among others.

In more forceful terms even than we would have used, they sought to characterise the closed-list system as one in which centralised party control and opportunities for cronyism are rife. As the hon. Member for Cardiff, West said, it is a system that makes it possible for party bosses to slip a Mickey Finn into the list, without the voters being able to do anything about it. As a result, in the fulness of time, MEPs will represent their party bosses rather than the voters of their region, and there will be no incentive for individual MEPs to stand up for the interests of their region or their constituents. They will be totally beholden to and owned by the party bosses.

That point has been made clear tonight. It puts the debate into a wider setting, and is certainly consistent with the pattern of behaviour of the Labour party in an increasing number of other settings, such as London and Wales, as my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay said.

If we need any more evidence that the proposal is all about exerting centralised party control, we can find it in the way in which the Labour party has chosen its candidates. The Home Secretary was right to say that those are internal Labour party matters, and we do not propose to venture into them, but they supply compelling evidence. Unlike Liberal Democrat and Conservative Members, who are individual party members who have had the opportunity to have a say, Labour Members have had no such opportunity.

The Home Secretary's argument about party lists was well demolished by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire, who drew attention to the important fact that, at least, within an open-list system, after the party bosses had drawn up the list, the voters would have the opportunity to express a preference for candidates on the list. In the closed-list system, that is not possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire asked whether the Home Secretary's amendment in lieu was transparent and could be relied on. Given the history of the year in which we have debated the matter, I do not think that it could. The Home Secretary said that he had always been consistent. We recall his words on Second Reading. He may have been consistent by his own criteria, but we recall a slightly different tone being set in those early debates, when he boasted about the consultation that was taking place. On Second Reading, he told us that he had an open mind on these matters, and that, although he had a preference, he was prepared to listen to the arguments. He even put a paper in the Library—

Mr. Straw: Is the hon. Gentleman criticising me for that?

Mr. Clappison: The Home Secretary asks whether he is being criticised. It is a matter of record that he said that he was prepared to listen. We believe that every representation that he has received from Labour Members, from Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members and from every outside organisation, is against the principle of the closed-list system, yet the Home Secretary and the Government decided to adopt that principle even though everyone else was against it. The Home Secretary discarded the Belgian system for reasons that he knew all about in the first place, and did not look at the other seven EU countries that also had a modified form of the open-list system. They were all cast aside. Every system has been ridiculed as far too complicated and difficult for voters to understand.

If Labour Members want to set any store by the amendment, they should look at the earlier amendment that was tabled by their own Back Benchers, calling for an evaluation by the Home Secretary of the open-list system after the elections had taken place. The amendment was tabled by the hon. Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg). It was an honourable attempt to give the Government the opportunity to think again, but they refused to do so.

That adds force to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire, who has drawn attention to the fact that the Government's proposal means that primary legislation would be required for a change to be made. If the Government had been prepared to listen to the arguments, they could have had a report ready by now, and implemented its conclusions in the Bill at this stage. However, they were not prepared to listen.

The real motive throughout has been to enhance centralised party control. This is a revealing glimpse of the real character of new Labour—more opportunities for cronyism and for centralised party control. We would do well to reflect on the widespread concerns outside the Chamber, and consider carefully the Lords amendment, which gives us an opportunity to have an open-list system. We do not prefer that to a first-past-the-post system, but it would strike a blow against centralised party control.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I shall be brief. We have discussed the nature of the list system at every stage of the Bill's passage through the House, and everything that needs to be said has probably already been said.

The Government remain strongly of the view that the list system for which the Bill originally provided is the most appropriate for Britain to use to elect our Members of the European Parliament. I am afraid that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and his hon. Friends have not understood that we are talking

not about elections to this House or to local councils, but about elections to the European Parliament, where 84 people represent the whole of Great Britain. Once they are elected, the MEPs do not perform the constituency functions that are familiar to members of this House, because the European Parliament is not responsible for housing, social security, individual employment matters, education or any of the issues that provide us all with so much of our constituency case work.

The public have far less opportunity to get to know the MEPs and aspiring MEPs in their region.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in due course. I shall let him in if there is time.

If the Lords amendment were accepted, voters would be forced to choose between candidates of the same party, which would inevitably involve some arbitrary and irrational choices. If anyone doubts that, they should bear in mind my experience during the 1970s, when I was a member of a local authority in a six-member ward. Every four years, two of us stood for election. My fellow Labour candidate was always Maurice Spillane, the local chemist, who, sadly, has since died. Every time that we stood in tandem, I came first because the first letter in my surname is "H", and Maurice Spillane came second. Thankfully, we were always both elected—it would have been surprising in that ward had we not been. Although I fondly believed that I always managed to beat him because of the sheer force of my personality, the truth is that it was because my name began with "H".

That will happen again. The evidence shows incontrovertibly that the choices would be exercised to the detriment of female and ethnic minority candidates. The Government are not prepared to countenance that.

There is also the problem that the open-list system, which the other place wants to introduce, might well—in fact, probably would—produce perverse results. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary carefully demonstrated how the candidate who receives the most votes might not win a seat. I genuinely ask Opposition Members to consider the implications of that.

Much has been said about how electors will feel about not having a choice between named candidates. Such criticism deserves an answer. Having chosen a candidate, how would a voter feel when he or she found that the majority of people who voted chose the same candidate, yet that candidate was not elected? That is not just a fanciful notion; it could happen if the system proposed in the other place were adopted. That argument is incontrovertible.

I turn to the passionate speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), which demonstrated his commitment not just to the House but to many other issues. He is a very passionate democrat. I enjoyed his speech, although I obviously did not agree with all his conclusions. As a democrat, is he prepared to abstain, as I think he said he would—even abstention would be an endorsement of the proposal—or to support in the Lobby a vote that was won in the House of Lords on 20 October by a majority of 44 simply because hereditary peers took part? On 4 November, there would not have been a majority of 29 without the intervention of hereditary peers. I ask him to reflect on that. I would be very happy if he joined us in the Lobby.

I turn to the thoughtful speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), who showed a far greater understanding of the systems than any Conservative Member, including those on the Front Bench.

Sir Norman Fowler *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howarth: If the right hon. Gentleman does not accept that, he should compare the speech of the hon. Member for Hallam with his own. It will become clear to him that the hon. Gentleman knows what he is talking about.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the Minister explain why, in two debates, not a single Labour Back Bencher has spoken in favour of the Front-Bench spokesman?

Mr. Howarth: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the Division Lists. My hon. Friends indicate their assent by the way in which they vote at the end of the debate.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Now say that with a straight face.

Mr. Howarth: I do say it with a straight face.

I turn to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). I should like to pick him up on one point. If I heard him correctly, he said that he was elected on an open list of one. He will correct me if I am wrong, but when the good people of Wrexham went to the polling booth, they found that he was the only Labour candidate on the ballot paper. He therefore stood on a closed list of one. I do not think that he can argue with that.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: I am coming to my comments on the hon. Gentleman's speech. If he is not happy after I have made them, I shall give way to him.

For three consecutive parliamentary evenings, I have sat here and listened to speeches by the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). Although I have not agreed with them, I must admit that they have improved each evening. However, they started from a pretty low point. I make this as a political point, and would not want it to be misunderstood as anything else, but I have a fear that I shall share with the House. It is that, when I wake up in the middle of the night I shall see before me a vision of the hon. Gentleman speaking, because it seems as if, every time I look up, there he is. Despite that, I enjoyed his speech tonight.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) asked about what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said about the review that will take place after the European elections to see how the system has worked in practice. I shall not add to what my right hon. Friend said, but as the hon. Gentleman asked about it, I shall make clear the intention behind the review. There will be a full and thorough review of the operation of the system. Nothing should be ruled out, and that includes comparisons with the way in which other systems might hypothetically have worked.

Mr. Drew: Will my hon. Friend give way?

[Mr. Drew]

9.45 pm

Mr. Howarth: I shall not, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, because the House has further business to deal with after the debate.

We have introduced an amendment that will ensure that, after the first elections using the system, a review will take place. I hope that, when our proposal is considered in another place, careful account will be taken of that commitment.

To elect their Members of the European Parliament, almost all the larger states of the European Union already use the system that the Government propose. It is true that nine member states use open or semi-open-list systems, but, with the exception of Italy—which I might venture to suggest offers no lessons when it comes to electoral systems—all those countries are small, and their political traditions are different from ours.

For all those reasons, the House should reject the amendments that were made to the Bill in another place thanks to the votes of those who have never been elected to any Parliament. We believe that the system that the Bill provides is appropriate and simple, and offers no prospect of perverse results. The idea that unelected hereditary peers can overturn the type of democratic system that the House proposes is too bizarre to contemplate.

Question put, That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 125.

Division No. 373] **[9.47 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Malleber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris

Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Keith Hill and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Arness, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

It being Ten o'clock, further consideration stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the European Parliamentary Elections Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

Question agreed to.

Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, again considered.

Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendments agreed to.

Income Tax

10.1 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Personal Equity Plan (Amendment) Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 1869), dated 31st July 1998, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st July, be annulled.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Individual Savings Account Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 1870), dated 31st July 1998, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st July, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Individual Savings Account (Insurance Companies) Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 1871), dated 31st July 1998, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st July, be annulled.

Mr. Gibb: We are glad to have an opportunity to debate the regulations on the Floor of the House. There is concern outside the House, as well as among the Opposition—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must not continue extraneous conversations when an item of business is before the House.

Mr. Gibb: There is concern that the Government are over prone to using secondary legislation, particularly under the negative resolution procedure, on tax matters. I trust that our debate will prove to be a precedent for dealing with future important, tax-related, negative resolution statutory instruments on the Floor of the House.

The regulations are the latest, but undoubtedly not the last, stage in the catalogue of disasters that makes up what might be called the Government's savings policy. The Government themselves predict that their policy will lead to a fall in the savings ratio from 10.5 per cent. when they took office to 7.75 per cent. over the lifetime of a Parliament. Their savings policy has in fact already led to the ratio falling to 7.75 per cent. within 18 months of their coming to power. That is not so much a savings policy as a dis-savings scandal.

Labour's election manifesto said that the Government would

"introduce a new individual savings account to extend the principle of TESSAs and PEPs to promote long-term savings."

True to his word, the Chancellor announced in his first Budget that the Government would

"introduce from 1999 individual savings accounts, extending the principle of TESSAs and PEPs and continuing to offer favourable tax reliefs for savings."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 306.]

The Government then inflicted enormous damage on people's confidence to save, first, by their imposition of a £5 billion a year tax on people's pension funds, and, secondly, in December 1997, by the Paymaster General's announcement that personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts would be abolished, and that individual savings accounts would be introduced. Abolition is hardly an extension. It is totally at odds with the Labour manifesto, and flatly contradicts the words of the Chancellor in his first Budget. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] Yes, where is he?

The new ISA, with its initial £50,000 lifetime limit, penalised the thrifty and the self-employed whose savings had been built up in lieu of a pension. With the announcement of those retrospective and draconian changes to the taxation of savings, people became understandably concerned that at some future date a Labour Government might do the same again. The damage inflicted by the announcement last December alone is incalculable—another major success of the Paymaster General. Perhaps that is why he is not here to defend the regulations which he published on 31 July 1998; he cannot be trusted to defend them himself.

The fanfare and hype that accompanied the Paymaster General's announcement last December, with the Prime Minister boasting that there would be 6 million extra savers—6 million people who would be able to save who could not then—were outdone only by the shock that Treasury Ministers received when faced with the public outcry.

There was outcry at the £50,000 limit on transferring from PEPS into ISAs. There was outcry at the retrospective taxation that was inherent in the new regime as it was introduced. There was outcry at the reduction in tax relief for savers from £10,800 a year to £5,000. There was outcry from the *Financial Times*, which said that the new system was "unfair", "unattractive" and "bureaucracy gone mad". There was outcry as well from the Consumers Association, which said that it could not see the point of ISAs. It said:

"We see no real advantages but a lot of problems."

There was outrage from the Government's favourite economists, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, which said that the replacement of PEPs and TESSAs by the ISA would reduce the pool of savings; how right it was with that forecast, with the savings ratio already down to 7.75 per cent. That outcry extended to the postbag of every hon. Member and to the 5,900 letters received by Ministers from members of the public.

I note that, yet again, the Economic Secretary is to defend the Government's case this evening. I cannot understand why the Government do not put up the gaffe-prone Chief Secretary, the Paymaster General or the Financial Secretary. What is up with the rest of the Treasury team that the Chancellor seems able to trust only the Economic Secretary? She is to be congratulated on that, or perhaps pitied for it.

Will the Economic Secretary answer the following points tonight? The Government's stated objective was to have millions of new savers depositing their spare cash at supermarket checkouts. Last March, the then Chief Secretary said that he wanted to extend the variety of outlets from which ISAs can be bought, including supermarkets.

In defending the regulations, will the Economic Secretary say how many supermarkets will be selling cash ISAs, or equity or insurance ISAs, at the checkout? Will she not admit that the ISA regulations before the House today contain complexity and costs which make it impossible for supermarkets to sell them at the till, which is why the supermarkets have said that they will not be doing so?

Does the Economic Secretary agree with Marks and Spencer that ISAs cannot be offered through the till, or does she agree with Stuart Sinclair, the chief executive of Tesco personal finance, who said:

"Like many in the industry we believe that the Government missed an opportunity to put together a basic plan to appeal to the mass market. It is a bit of a non-event."

Or perhaps the Economic Secretary agrees with Roger McArthur, chief executive of Sainsbury's bank, who said:

"We believe that it is important to recognise the commercial realities in which the potential ISA providers operate . . . the ISA will work properly only if it is cost-effective for providers as well as customers."

Many supermarkets such as Marks and Spencer may well provide ISAs through their normal mail order financial services operation, but none will operate ISAs through the checkout till, which was a central plank of the Government's objective of extending the number of savers by 6 million. Nothing in the regulations is likely to make that a realistic target.

The catalogue of incompetence continued. In March, the Government finally backed down on their absurd £50,000 lifetime limit and the Chancellor announced details of his proposed scheme. He said that

"the individual savings account will . . . offer complete freedom to move cash in and out".

That is not true, as the details published by the Treasury make clear. Cash can be moved out, but investors can reinvest it only if they have not already put in £1,000 in that tax year, regardless of whether the £1,000 remains.

The Chancellor also said that

"the individual savings account will receive a 10-year guarantee that savings up to £5,000 a year can be invested with all existing . . . reliefs."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1102.]

That is not true either, because after five years the tax credit rebate disappears—a slight case of ISA mis-selling by the Chancellor. Many people suspect that the 10-year guarantee introduces a £50,000 lifetime limit by the back door.

ISAs were not really intended to extend savings, but are yet another method by which the Government hope to raise tax revenue. In March, the Chief Secretary admitted that. He said that the problem was that the cost in terms of lost revenue of tax relief for TESSAs and PEPs was £1.5 billion a year, rising on current trends to £2 billion by 2007. That seems a small price to pay when some 3 million people have PEPs and 4.5 million have TESSAs, and those numbers were increasing.

TESSAs and PEPs were very successful savings incentives. As Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies said, almost all the objectives of the ISA

"could equally have been achieved by abolishing the five year lock-in period on TESSAs and leaving things as they were."

The Institute of Chartered Accountants—[*Interruption*], which I am always keen to quote, said:

"It is our conclusion that it would be more straightforward to amend the existing PEP and TESSA savings schemes rather than introduce a wholly new scheme, particularly as the . . . ISA does not appear to offer improved savings incentives, and in fact may well discourage many individuals from saving."

The tax incentives set out in regulation 22 of the ISA regulations are much less. The shares ISA will have a tax credit of only 10 per cent. and only until 2004, whereas under the previous Conservative Government PEPs had the full 20 per cent. tax credit. Will the Economic Secretary tell the House what the tax advantages are for a basic rate taxpayer who holds equities through an ISA? Given that such an individual is unlikely to use his annual capital gains limit, and that ISA charges, even with the cost access terms standards, are likely to exceed the tax credit, what are the advantages? If the hon. Lady insists that there are advantages, will she tell the House by what date she expects the Prime Minister's forecast of 6 million more savers to have been met?

Despite all the changes to ISAs since their original launch last December, the savings industry still believes that they are too complex. The regulations add to that complexity. The PEP and ISA Management Association points out that a significant number of PEP holders broke the rules, usually by subscribing to two managers in one year, and had their PEPs declared void; and that, as ISAs are even more complicated, more mistakes will be made.

There are three types of ISA: cash, shares and insurance. They have different limits, but a higher limit in the year 1999-2000. There are maxi and mini ISAs. Mini ISAs are designed so that investors can chose different managers, but maxi ISAs can have only one manager. One cannot have both a maxi and a mini ISA in one tax year. On top of all that, there are the continuing rules for PEPs and transitional rules for moving from a TESSA to a cash ISA, at regulation 5 of the Individual Savings Account Regulations 1998. Today, *The Sun* exposes an enormous loophole in the regulations—an ISA and a TESSA can be held in the same tax year.

There is concern in the industry that the regulations make it difficult for any one organisation to offer an ISA with a full range of cash, life assurance and equity components, because the regulations allow ISA providers to link up with only one other specialist organisation. There is also concern about the absence of statutory compensation for depositors if an ISA manager who is not himself a deposit taker defaults on cash held before passing on the cash to the deposit taker. Why is there nothing in the regulations to deal with that?

Those problems are compounded for the industry by continued Government delays in publishing regulations and details, which make it nigh on impossible to develop the necessary information technology systems by April 1999, when the regulations come into force—particularly given that there are millennium bug problems to deal with as well. We believe that the Government should delay the introduction of the ISA for at least a year to give the industry the chance to implement new IT systems correctly. They should allow new PEPs and TESSAs to continue during that period.

In its compliance cost assessment of ISAs, the Inland Revenue calculates that the cost of running a cash ISA will be up to £4 per annum per account higher than the annual running cost of a TESSA, and that the cost of running a shares ISA will be up to £2 per annum per account higher than the cost of running a PEP. That is in addition to the £250 million set-up cost which the Inland Revenue estimates for the new ISA.

Those are significant extra costs, and I cannot understand how a more complex and more expensive savings regime with fewer tax incentives will encourage lower-income individuals without savings to start to save. Perhaps the Economic Secretary would elucidate.

[Mr. Gibb]

No wonder that Standard Life, the largest mutual life assurer in Europe, is refusing to offer the insurance ISA. Peter Robinson, the marketing manager at Standard Life, said:

"We did some focus groups with customers."

The Economic Secretary and her party know all about focus groups.

"They could see the point of the cash ISA and the Stocks and Shares ISA but not the insurance ISA.

If they are struggling with the point of it, we were going to be struggling with selling it."

Gordon Maw, of Virgin Direct, said:

"We wouldn't touch it with a barge pole."

Other companies simply think that it is not commercially viable. Nothing in the Individual Savings Account (Insurance Companies) Regulations 1998 makes it an appealing stand-alone product. Perhaps the Economic Secretary can tell the House how she expects the insurance ISA to succeed.

There are a huge number of concerns about cost access terms marks in the savings industry. They appear to give a halo to the ISA provider—almost a Government guarantee, even though the standard concerns itself only with administration charges and accessibility. The Personal Investment Authority, for instance, has said:

"The development of the CAT standards amounts in effect to product endorsement. This could lead to the danger that investors could be steered away from other products . . . more suitable for their needs, but which did not meet the CAT requirements."

The level of charges will also act as an anti-competitive barrier to entry. Only those equity ISA providers with large portfolios will be able to charge only 1 per cent. per annum, thus keeping new providers out of the market altogether.

Can the Economic Secretary also clarify a point on which the savings industry is finding it difficult to get an answer? Will she confirm that, for the purposes of the CAT mark, the 1 per cent. charge permitted for shares ISAs does not include costs incurred by the fund in relation to stamp duty on share transactions in the underlying investments?

Although Conservative Members welcome some of the changes to the regulations that have been made since they were published in draft in May, especially those relating to the transitional rules and the extended time limits for reporting requirements, there are still many concerns in the industry over issues such as the determination by the Inland Revenue that protected funds and short-term gilts should be excluded from ISAs because of concern that they will become cash substitutes.

Some in the industry think that the restriction in regulation 7(6) is unnecessary and counterproductive in that these are the very products that best fit the Government's objective of encouraging people to save for the long term, and to obtain a return that is better than that from a deposit account.

There is also concern about the constitutional propriety of CAT marks that have been issued in a Treasury press release, without any legislation or statutory instrument—under either the negative or the affirmative procedure—coming before the House, and which the Financial Services Authority considers binding as law.

The introduction of ISAs and the abolition of PEPs and TESSAs has been a catastrophic mistake by the Government. It has been a catalogue of incompetence by a Minister who is not even here to defend his policy, but has left it to the Economic Secretary to pick up the pieces. This policy is costly to the savings industry, has damaged savings and has added to the Government's macro-economic blunders. The Government's savings policy is a shambles, and I urge the House to oppose these regulations.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) referred to the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) said, from a sedentary position, although his remarks were audible to us, "How much are they paying you?"

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. The matter may come up in debate, but I did not hear that remark.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a signatory to the motion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can already advise the hon. Member that that is pursuant to a point of order that I have ruled is not a point of order.

10.21 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I thank the Opposition and the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) for giving us another opportunity to debate individual savings accounts. We have done precisely what the Opposition did when they introduced PEPs by way of regulations rather than through primary legislation. However, what we have done that the Opposition did not do with PEPs when they were in government is to consult widely about the detail of ISAs. The House has already debated ISAs on a number of occasions and at some length.

The consideration that the House has given to ISAs and the extensive consultation outside the House have helped to lay the ground to make the introduction of ISAs a success. ISAs are, indeed, going to be a great success, and that is now widely accepted within the savings industry.

A recent circular sent out by a stockbroking firm says:

"We were pleased to see so many readers at our recent presentation. Some were surprised by our comments on the new Individual Savings Account. Contrary to what newspapers may say, readers should be in no doubt. ISAs should be big, very big. After April, they will be the prime savings product, heavily promoted, with much greater investment scope than PEPs. And Catmarking should be beneficial. It will encourage the development of direct marketing of low cost products."

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Who said that?

Ms Hewitt: Hoare Govett.

Annulling the tax regulations now, as this motion seeks to do, would spread uncertainty and alarm throughout the savings industry. That is what the Opposition are seeking to do, and such a step would be deeply unpopular. Firms are currently busy designing their ISA products and their advertising campaigns.

Mr. Loughton: Of the more than 7 million people who own PEPs and TESSAs, how many does that financial, foreign-owned firm have on its books?

Ms Hewitt: I am astonished to hear a Conservative Member apparently objecting to a stockbroker firm operating in this country because it is foreign owned. I shall happily quote the literature of Virgin Direct and Marks and Spencer, which enthusiastically welcome ISAs.

Let me return to my point about the Opposition motion. Firms are busy designing their ISA products and their advertising campaigns. The time and effort that they are putting into ISAs would be wasted if the regulations were annulled, and that would certainly not be well received—especially when it was discovered that the motions were technically flawed, as they are.

Let me give two examples. First, the motions seek annulment of only three of the four ISA-related sets of regulations that were laid before Parliament on 31 July. Secondly, they would leave cash savers high and dry. I think I am right in saying that the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton served on the Finance Bill Committee, on which I understand he was known to his colleagues as "Mr. Bean from Bognor". The Act that the Bill became prevents tax-exempt special savings accounts from being opened after April 1999.

I see no merit in the motions, but what I can do is commend the ISA initiative. We designed ISAs to encourage people to save in a fair and efficient way, and to raise the level of long-term savings. Half the population have less than £200 in savings, and half those people have no savings at all. Many people—I know this from my constituency, Leicester, West—have no bank accounts, let alone any form of savings. This Government are determined to help people who are not saving to get started, and to help people who are already saving to save more.

Offering tax incentives is an important way of encouraging people to save, but we need to balance that against the cost to the public purse. As a new Government, we set about looking at how we could rebalance the cost of the PEP and TESSA schemes that we had inherited. We wanted to encourage more people to save, and at the same time to distribute the available tax relief more fairly.

It may be helpful if I now dispel one of the common myths about ISAs. They were not introduced to reduce the cost of tax relief. The cost of ISAs to the public purse is broadly what PEPs and TESSAs would have cost if they had continued unchanged. That cost is forecast to grow to about £2 billion in five years' time. ISAs are very much about distributing tax relief more fairly among more people; they are not about reducing the overall tax relief on savings.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Does the Minister accept that PEPs and TESSAs probably did little to increase aggregate savings, simply encouraging people to put whatever they were already saving into more tax-privileged facilities? What does she think ISAs will do to change that?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. As I shall explain in a moment, in the design of ISAs—and the design of CAT standards—we have overcome some of the most important barriers that are mentioned when those who would like to save, and know that they should be saving, are asked why they are not doing so.

As well as ensuring a wider distribution of tax relief, we were determined to widen the range of savings products in comparison with what had formerly been available. A wider range, including life insurance, will attract new savers and encourage small savers to save more. It was clear to us that PEPs and TESSAs could not be modified in a practical way to meet our objectives. We therefore decided that a completely new approach was needed, and the ISA was developed.

We appreciated that we would get a better product if we tapped into the experience and expertise of savers and the savings industry. We therefore engaged in open, wide-ranging and constructive consultations at every stage in the development of the ISA. Consultation papers have been issued on the structure of the scheme, the detailed tax regulations, CAT standards and product regulation.

It has been widely recognised that the Government listened during the consultation, and that we have acted on what we heard. When I spoke at a recent conference of PEP and ISA managers, several speakers praised all involved for the constructive way in which they had listened and responded. Praise for the Inland Revenue, the Treasury and the Financial Services Authority all at the same time is not, in my experience, common, but I heard it, and on several occasions.

The results of that approach are often presented by the Opposition as some sort of climbdown or U-turn. That completely misunderstands what consultation is about. Consultation is a much better approach than the excessive secrecy under which such changes were introduced in the past. The previous Government introduced PEPs in 1987 without such consultation and had to relaunch them in a substantially modified form just two years later.

We are committed to open, genuine and honest consultations and we are grateful to all those who contributed to the ISA consultation. Their input has been highly valued and highly valuable. We have modified our approach, including the detail of the regulations, as a result of their comments. We have a better product as a result.

I turn to the details of the ISA. It offers, of course, tax-free savings, with a broad and flexible range of schemes. As the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton said, it has three different components: cash, a life insurance policy or stocks and shares. It offers the flexibility of one manager managing all three components within a so-called "maxi" account, or the different components can be managed by up to three different managers with so-called "mini" accounts. That flexibility is one of the features that was introduced into the scheme as a result of the consultation.

[Ms Hewitt]

Research that we have commissioned in the Treasury, confirming results of research by other people, shows that 90 per cent. of people want easy access to savings and that two thirds of them are worried about the small print. ISAs address both those points.

Mr. Loughton: The hon. Lady again mentions research done within the Treasury. How does she gel that with the statement by Paula Diggle, head of financial services at the Treasury, who said at a PEP conference in June:

"We do not have a market research budget—I wish we did"?

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to say that the civil servant to whom the hon. Gentleman refers assisted me in the research that I commissioned.

ISAs and CATs are designed to address those barriers to savings that our research and that of many other people have established are a problem. At the moment, someone investing in a TESSA has to lock their money away for up to five years to qualify for tax relief—one of the biggest barriers to saving by people who would like to save, but are terrified that their money will not be available in an emergency when they need it. With the ISA, there is no minimum lock-in period and, indeed, no minimum subscription. That is why saving with a cash ISA is so simple.

Mr. Gibb: If the hon. Lady has done so much research, perhaps she will tell the House by which date the Prime Minister's forecast of 6 million new savers will be met.

Ms Hewitt: There is no target for the number of new savers or new accounts, but we are confident, because of the way in which the design of ISA and CAT standards responds to the concerns of those who are not currently saving, or those who are only saving very little, that, over some years, ISAs will build up extremely successfully.

As I have said, half this country's population have savings of less than £200. There is a large market out there, which we need to reach. I hope that Opposition Members will support us in that aim.

Mr. Loughton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Hewitt: I have already given way twice to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that he will forgive me if I try to make some progress.

The ISA scheme is guaranteed to run for 10 years. We will review the future of the scheme at the seven-year point, but it means that anyone contributing to an ISA will have a level of certainty that has never been available in the past. Of course, we will keep the scheme under review and we will make changes where necessary to help ISAs run more smoothly. However, the scheme itself is secure for 10 years. Existing PEP and TESSA holders will not be disadvantaged in any way. PEPs can run on, though without additional contributions, and TESSA holders can continue to contribute to existing schemes within the current limits. When the TESSA matures, the capital can be rolled over into an ISA.

I shall deal now with the CAT standards, a feature of the ISA scheme which we believe will help to attract new savers and new savings. I have referred to the research which shows that people are worried about the small print on existing savings products. It puts many people off saving. They fear that they may be ripped off by people who know considerably more than they do about finance. It is not surprising that people have those fears when, as we all know, too many people have been ripped off in the past. The pensions mis-selling scandal, which we are now having to clear up, shows that only too clearly.

The Government have looked at ways to help investors. For some years now there has been a regime of disclosure. It has been beneficial, but insufficient to increase competition when inexperienced consumers are faced with expert providers. So we opted for a system of voluntary benchmarks that will empower consumers and strengthen competition in the financial services marketplace.

We have introduced CAT standards. The term is designed to avoid any confusion and describes quite succinctly the purpose of the benchmarks. CAT standards will set levels for costs, for access and for terms of ISA products. If an ISA account meets the CAT standard, people will know that it offers fair charges, easy access and decent terms.

Under the CAT standard, charges will be fair and transparent and will not exceed the set upper limits. For example, on a standard stocks and shares ISA there will be an annual charge that cannot exceed 1 per cent. and the saver will not face the hidden charges which, all too often, exist at present in addition to the annual charge.

The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton asked about precisely what is covered in the annual charge. There is no confusion on that point. Let me make it clear that, whenever they have been asked, Treasury officials have spelt that out to applicants who want to become managers for ISAs, and to others seeking guidance. The annual charge includes dilution levies and the stamp duty on the individual investor's unit, but it does not cover the cost of transactions in the underlying fund. The single price that will be required for a fund to meet the CAT standard is struck after the costs of transactions, stamp duties and dealing costs have been covered. In other words, the price automatically takes account of them and they are not logged against the annual management charge.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Is it not possible that people may be misled into thinking that something that has a CAT standard is entirely appropriate for their circumstances, whereas it may be inappropriate for that investor? Is there not a danger that the introduction of CAT standards will lead to even more widespread mis-selling?

Ms Hewitt: That is an important point and it is something that we thought about carefully before deciding on the nature and design of the CAT standard for the equity ISA.

It is clear from research carried out by the Financial Services Authority and on its behalf, that investors faced with the sort of basic information that will be required for a CAT standard ISA understand very well that it is not a Government guarantee. The CAT standard spells out that there will be an investment risk. We believe—we have good reason to believe it on the basis of that research—that the CAT standard will strengthen consumers in

inquiring about the difference between a CAT standard equity ISA and a non-CAT standard product. Therefore, providers offering non-CAT standard products, either instead of or alongside CAT standard equity ISAs, will be able and even encouraged to explain to potential investors why their product, although its annual charge may perhaps be higher than that for a CAT standard ISA, may none the less be more appropriate for a particular investor. That is precisely what we mean by empowering consumers, making the market more transparent and enhancing competition.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): How does the hon. Lady respond to the suggestion that the CAT standard will prevent smaller and more recently established providers from coming into the market?

Ms Hewitt: I do not accept that there is any evidence for that proposition. It is obvious that the CAT standards that we have set—although they are challenging, and deliberately so, to the market—are sustainable. New providers are already coming into the market. On cash ISAs, National Savings—which was debarred from the market by the previous Government—has announced its intention to offer a CAT standard ISA.

On access, the important point about a CAT standard ISA is that access will be easy and that people can have confidence that they will be able to get their money out if they need it. With an insurance ISA, for example, people will be able to get at least their premiums back after three years or more. There will also be no discovering—as currently happens all too often—that one's money has vanished if one has to cash in a policy early.

The third element of the CAT standards is that terms will be fair. Nothing will be hidden, and there will be no nasty surprises in the small print. There will be no restructuring of accounts once customers have signed up or interest rates cut after deposits are made.

There are those in the savings industry who have been concerned about the CAT standards and claim that the limit set for charges is too challenging. We shall certainly be monitoring the impact of the CAT standards once the system goes live, and we shall make changes if they are needed.

I should stress that the CAT standards are voluntary. Firms will offer CAT standard products if they want to, and some have already said publicly that they intend to do so. Other firms have said that they will offer products that do not meet the CAT standard but that—as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) suggested—may be more appropriate for certain consumers, perhaps covering riskier investments, and therefore requiring more management and higher fees but offering the potential for higher returns. That is precisely the type of choice that we want in a competitive marketplace for savings.

If firms decide not to offer a CAT standard ISA, their marketing will have to show that the ISA does not meet the CAT standards.

The other main criticism of CAT standards has been that they will be seen as a form of guarantee. As I said, CAT standards give no guarantee—because nobody can—about the performance of an investment. CAT standards themselves require providers to make the investment risk clear in marketing information on the product, just as the Government's publicity will make it clear that a CAT standard is not a Government guarantee.

CAT standards will address features of savings that we know worry the small saver or put off entirely the potential saver. They will help to remove the worry of getting ripped off, help savers get fair and decent treatment and give savers greater confidence.

There is now less than six months to go before the launch of ISAs, and a great deal of work has been done by ISA managers to prepare products for launch in April. The Government still have their part to play. The Inland Revenue will shortly be tendering for the publicity campaign that will increase awareness of ISAs and ensure that they get off to a good start next April. As part of that awareness campaign, a leaflet will be produced later in the year to provide details of the ISA and how it can be used.

The savings industry wanted early notice of the rules for ISAs, so that it could move ahead with its planning. The Inland Revenue's tax regulations give them that notice, and the work that is now being done by the industry is based on the detailed tax regulations that were laid before Parliament on 31 July 1998. The industry wants to be left to get on with its work. It wants to be able to develop its products, so that when April comes, ISAs will be widely available in the market. We can see the early signs of its work in the information that is already coming through our letter boxes and in the pre-ISA accounts being offered on the high street.

What the industry and the consumer do not need is indecision. The Opposition's prayers do nothing constructive. If accepted, they would introduce unnecessary worry and concern and would result in the waste of a great deal of time and money already invested by savings firms. We should be thinking about our constituents—how we can help them consider their existing savings plans or how they might start to save.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I have been listening to the hon. Lady with great interest. One thing that unites all parts of the House is that we should encourage our constituents to save. Given what the hon. Lady has said about promoting ISAs, not in opposition to PEPs and TESSAs but as a complement to them, how much does she think her proposals will increase the amount that our constituents save in net terms next year?

Ms Hewitt: As I said, half the people in this country have savings of less than £200 and some have no savings at all. One of the biggest barriers to saving for people who could afford to save a bit and who know that they ought to be saving is the danger that they will not be able to get their money back when they want it. The cash ISA, especially the CAT standard cash ISA, removes that and other barriers that my constituents have outlined to me. We are confident that new savers, as well as existing small savers, will take advantage of the new ISAs next April and in the months and years that follow.

We now need to let the savings industry get on with the work that it has in hand. With the Government Departments involved and with, I hope, the support of the Opposition, the savings industry will then be able to make ISAs a success for all our constituents. We should reject the prayers, and I am sure that the House will support me in doing just that.

10.46 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am grateful for having caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must declare an interest, as set out in the Register of Members' Interests, in that I am guilty of professionally managing personal equity plans since their inception in 1987 and have owned some for many years.

The independents savings account debacle is a textbook example—

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My memory was jogged by talk of Members' interests. The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), the shadow Chancellor, is a director of Gartmore Shared Equity Trust plc, which manages PEPs and from which the right hon. Gentleman receives £8,500 a year. Is it in order for him to fail to draw attention to that fact when he is a signatory to one of the motions that deals with PEPs?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): That is not a matter for the Chair. Any complaint of that nature should be made to Sir Gordon Downey.

Mr. Loughton: Labour Members become very anxious when a Conservative Member who knows something about the subject being debated rises to speak. When we debate financial affairs, it is only a matter of nanoseconds before a Labour Back Bencher comes up with that well-worn phrase "pensions mis-selling", whatever the subject we are debating, because that is the sum total of Labour's knowledge of the financial industry in general.

The episode started on 2 December last year with the publication of the ill-fated Green Paper by the Paymaster General, who I regret is not here to see through the fruits of his work, which has not yet ended. The regulations that we are now debating eventually crept out during the recess at the beginning of October after numerous delays and, whatever the Economic Secretary says, after numerous U-turns and double U-turns. The main document was entitled "Making Savings Easy", but it actually made saving rather more difficult and met with widespread outcry or outrage from the professional investment community. It was all in aid of a vastly inferior product to the highly successful PEPs and TESSAs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) said, because of the Chancellor's need to produce a new-labelled product for savings with his own name on it.

The whole debacle has not been helped by the last-minute regulations, directive and instructions that have sneaked out. There are now just 146 days to go until ISAs supposedly go live. It has been estimated that it will cost the financial community more than £100 million just to set up the computer systems. Inevitably, those costs will be passed on to the users and consumers of ISAs. A survey has found that probably at least one third of potential ISA fund managers will not be ready to go live with ISAs on 6 April next year and that is almost exclusively down to the dilly-dallying, delay and obfuscation of Ministers and Treasury officials.

However the Economic Secretary may dress it up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ISAs will cost you, me and all our constituents more. The Treasury has estimated that ISAs will be between 30 and 40 per cent. more expensive to run than PEPs and TESSAs. In August, the Inland Revenue estimated that the cost of setting up and running ISAs for the first year would be about £250 million—a sum that has increased because of the Government's delay and dilly-dallying. ISA fund managers will also have the added computer costs of dealing with the year 2000, the single pricing that will come in with open-ended investment companies—OIECs—and a whole raft of other new financial measures.

As for the Economic Secretary saying that it has been absolutely clear what the charges would include, that only crept out about a week ago. Until the end of October, the national financial press was still raising questions about that matter. This evening provides the first record of a Minister making it clear—if, indeed, it is clear—what the charges will include, only 146 days before ISAs start.

Standard Life, one of the largest mutual societies in Europe, has condemned ISAs as being generally seen as substandard replacements for PEPs and TESSAs. Whatever gloss the Economic Secretary puts on it, ISAs are inferior to PEPs and TESSAs because the amount that people will be able to invest in them after the first year will be £5,000 per annum. Under the PEPs and TESSAs regime, the annual amount was £10,800 per annum—more than double. It is an inferior product that will encourage less savings into the tax-advantageous environment. ISAs will also be inferior because the tax credit goes down to 10 per cent. For the average taxpayer, that means a saving on the income by being in ISAs of just £15 a year at most before charges. In reality, charges will rub out the whole tax saving that they may have gained.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the view of Standard Life is all the more pertinent since the Government recently invited the chief executive of Standard Life to be a deputy governor of the Bank of England?

Mr. Loughton: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, but it is yet another inconsistency in the way in which the Government work.

When the Paymaster General deigned to come to the House after announcing the whole ISA scheme outside, he reminded us that simplicity, flexibility, accessibility and fairness were the hallmarks of that great new product, but as time went on certain of those terms disappeared.

Let me dwell on the accessibility argument and the new providers, or rather their absence. I am sorry that the Economic Secretary declined the challenge made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton to name some of the new providers. As he succinctly put it, the supermarkets have given it a serious thumbs down. Tesco, Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer are unlikely to be offering the products at the checkout, as was specifically encouraged in the preface to the Green Paper on 2 December.

Some of the larger providers in the financial community have also given the plan the thumbs down. Pearl Assurance is concerned that the charges will be set so low that it will not be able to produce a CAT standard ISA. Standard Life has decided not to sell mortgages backed by ISAs, claiming that they offer no advantages over traditional endowment policies. It has also decided not to sell the life assurance element of the ISA. Its chief

executive said that the company did not expect that the tax treatment of ISAs would make it any more attractive to invest for mortgage repayment through them than through an endowment. It has decided to withdraw its PEP mortgage product from sale.

That has implications for those who have regular PEP savings plans—1.5 million people choose to save in PEPs in that way—particularly those who use them to fund their mortgages. If new ISA providers do not appear and if their existing PEP mortgage provider decides not to provide ISAs, how will they save every month against their mortgages using a tax-advantageous scheme? It has been claimed that the drop-out rate will be as high as 20 per cent. for those whose firms do not roll over into ISA schemes. That is a damaging possibility for those who fund their mortgages in that way.

At the press conference that launched ISAs, the Paymaster General said that marketing was key. We seemed to be promised that a duff product would yet again be dressed up in Labour spin doctors' best clothes and flogged to an unwary public. Yet the princely sum of £1.2 million has been set aside as the promotion budget for ISAs. That includes nothing for television or major media coverage and compares with the £25 million that was set aside to promote Hector the friendly tax man. It will need a lot more than hope and £1.2 million of flimsy marketing budgets to explain the complexities of the ISA scheme to savers, particularly the ubiquitous 6 million virgin savers, if I may call them that. Whatever the Economic Secretary may say and however she may try to wriggle out of the target of 6 million savers that was bashed at us time and again, the Prime Minister said on 3 December:

"The announcement . . . is good news for middle Britain. There will be 6 million extra savers as a result—6 million who will be able to save but at present cannot."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 349.]

That sounds to me like a target. I should like to know when, on the long road between 2 December last year and tonight, that ceased to be a target. It sounds like one of those early pledges that are not, in fact, early.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Does my hon. Friend agree that, whereas last week we were treated to Peter Pan economics, this is a case of Tinkerbell targeting?

Mr. Loughton: That is a soundbite worthy of Labour's best spin doctors, if I may compliment my hon. Friend.

The 6 million virgin investors are the great mystery of our times. Where is the great queue of people clamouring outside the doors of the Treasury to hurl their money into the new ISA schemes? Who are these people? In the final list, the Economic Secretary may even be able to name them, because there will be very few. The mystery of the 6 million is a mystery greater than the Loch Ness monster, large cats in Norfolk and anything that could be thrown at us from "The X files".

All the inferior considerations of the ISA scheme that I have listed might just imaginably be worth while if the Government could prove that it really would encourage a greater saving mentality among the supposed 6 million people. There is no evidence whatever—there has been no evidence since 3 December—that the scheme will encourage a single virgin investor to become a saver. I challenge the Government again: who are the 6 million people?

I was not comforted by the Economic Secretary's disclosure that Paula Diggle helped her in the research. It has been plain all along that, before the Treasury produced the Green Paper, it had done no research into the savings mentality and regime. It is now patently clear that, since then, it has still conducted no such proper research. The finance industry has been left to do its own research.

A MORI poll, commissioned by the Midland bank and the *Financial Mail on Sunday* in the summer, found the following. Only 47 per cent. of the public are aware that PEPs and TESSAs are to be replaced by ISAs in April—quite a challenge for the £1.25 million promotion budget—but 51 per cent. of them are unlikely to take out an ISA. Only 3 per cent. of adults earning less than £11,500 per annum said that they were very likely to invest in an ISA, and 32 per cent. said that PEPs offered greater tax efficiency—against only 12 per cent. who said that ISAs did.

A similar poll, carried out at the same time by the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds, found that only 18 per cent. of PEP holders plan to invest a similar amount or more in ISAs when they are introduced next year. That is the research that the Treasury failed to do when it embarked on this lamentable scheme. If such research is correct, the start for ISAs next year and the subsequent few years will not be attractive.

I shall touch on the many other complications in the ISA scheme. The Inland Revenue will have one hell of a job monitoring maxi and mini ISAs, all the different providers that one ISA investor can employ, and the scale of withdrawals and subsequent reinvestment. The news that there is a substantial logjam in many Inland Revenue offices, such that sacks of mail from as early as April lay unopened and tagged with the date, and are being opened in chronological order only now; the fact that an estimated 1 million people were last year sent incorrect tax bills during the first year of self-assessment; and the future challenge of corporate self-assessment later this year do not instil confidence in me that the Inland Revenue will be able to cope with the complexities of the scheme.

I will not touch on CAT standards—my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton covered that issue satisfactorily. Suffice it to say that, right from the start, it was clear that the cat had used up its nine lives before it was born. The ultimate absurdity of CAT standards, as the Economic Secretary almost admitted, is the fact that savings and investment accounts backed by the Government at the moment fail signally to meet such standards—even though the Government envisage national savings playing an important role in the development of ISAs.

I shall skim through several other minor details. Cheap capital protective funds have been excluded from ISAs, yet futures and options funds can reduce the risk for cautious new investors. Until the Financial Services Authority assumes full control of ISAs—if such a Bill proves to be part of the Queen's Speech—a dissatisfied ISA holder may have to deal with three separate regulators. The Government could have amended PEPs and TESSAs—an already successful savings culture. If it ain't bust, don't fix it.

How many providers have registered an interest in providing ISAs from 6 April next year, and is the financial press right to say that, far from the target of 500 to

[Mr. Loughton]

600 which appeared in the Economic Secretary's answer to one of my parliamentary questions, little more than a dozen have so far signalled their intent?

The ISA programme represents a major lost opportunity to update and streamline the existing PEPs and TESSAs and to encourage savings. The system could perhaps have been linked with benefits system, to provide a kickstart incentive for the less well off to save.

Instead, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton said, the initiative is harming the existing savings mentality and driving down the savings ratio. It is a sorry tale, and I back the calls by my Front-Bench colleague for a 12-month moratorium during which PEPs and TESSAs continue with their full allowances until the Government have proved that a substantial number of new investors will be attracted in by the ISA scheme. If they fail to prove that, as I am sure they will, we should stay with what we already have, because it works rather well.

11.5 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I follow on from what my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) has said by observing how clear it is that the Government's decision to change the savings schemes was simply an attempt to rebrand a Conservative success story. Only someone who lived in wonderland would believe that changing the name from "PEP" to "ISA" would increase the number of people who want to subscribe to savings schemes.

The almost 8 million people who had either a PEP or a TESSA before the Labour party came to power had saved a total of more than £60 billion between them—a sum greater than the pension savings in the entire German economy. Such an achievement in the 10 years since PEPs were launched by the Conservative Chancellor of the day is a measure of the success of the previous Government in targeting and promoting genuine long-term savings.

The Minister complained that under the Conservative scheme there was a five-year lock-in. However, as everyone knows, if one invests in the share market there may be ups and downs in the short term, and only if one is prepared to invest in the longer term do the benefits show through.

Ms Hewitt: Will the hon. Gentleman correct that statement? TESSAs, which had a lock-in period, were cash accounts.

Mr. St. Aubyn: That is correct, but PEPs were not.

Ms Hewitt: But as the hon. Gentleman, I am sure, was about to say, there was no lock-in period for PEPs.

Mr. St. Aubyn: There was a penalty for withdrawing from PEPs in the early years, as the hon. Lady well knows. The point is that long-term incentives coupled with a tax incentive are part of the winning formula that the previous Government developed.

That follows on from the principle of pension savings. Those have a much longer lock-in period, and let us consider how successful they have been. Pension savings, with the tax incentives that the Conservative Government promoted, have given us in this country the best savings rate for our retirement of almost any country in the world. Our pension savings are greater, cumulatively, than those of the rest of the European Union put together.

Long-term savings with long-term tax breaks and a long-term lock-in are a successful formula for savings in our country. Does the Economic Secretary believe that the level of national savings matters? There are left-wing economists who maintain that in the new global economy, the level of savings in one individual country is not especially significant.

Perhaps the hon. Lady has that sophisticated point of view, and does not worry about the fact that the savings level in this country has declined so disastrously since her party came to power. Does the Economic Secretary care about that, and what, in practical terms, will she do? The evidence from my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) is that ISAs are not part of the solution to the fall in the savings rate that has occurred since Labour came to power.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the disaster of the Government's plans has been that, when they were announced, they included the particularly unattractive ceiling of £50,000, and it was only because the feelings of so many constituents of all Members of Parliament were that that was a completely disastrous policy that the Government were forced to change their mind? Does he agree that that completely undermined the City's faith in what the Government were originally setting out to do, which was to change PEPs and TESSAs?

Mr. St. Aubyn: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, which I was about to make myself. The implication is that, without the stout opposition of Conservative Members of Parliament, the Government would have got away with a mis-selling that would have put any other mis-selling in the shade. The Government promised in their manifesto that they would not jeopardise PEPs and TESSAs; yet, until we piled on the pressure, that is exactly what they proposed doing.

Many other hon. Members wish to speak, and I wish them to have full force. I therefore conclude by saying that a tax break was involved in PEPs and TESSAs, but it was available to those who were prepared to take responsibility for their own lives. In changing to the ISA, there is a suspicion—as pinpointed by *The Economist*—that, by putting a cap on new savings, far from trying to appeal to those who do not have the money to save anyway, the Government are attempting to attack the middle classes and their attempts to look after their own lives and to provide for their own futures.

11.11 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): When the concept of ISAs was introduced, my colleagues and I were complimentary about the vision of a large expansion of savings, which was initially envisaged as being from £6 million to £12 million. In the early stages of the discussion, the Government showed some willingness to

listen to criticism, and that is why we had the retreat on the lifetime savings question. However, as the details of the proposal have developed, there has been a growing scepticism—even among those of us who are well disposed to the idea—about how it will work in practice.

The first important issue is whether the proposal satisfies the problem of low-income savers. The Economic Secretary described the underlying reasons behind ISAs—that providing liquidity for low-income savers would encourage savings behaviour. All the research has shown that that is totally inadequate as an incentive for the low-income saver. Roughly 30 per cent. of households pay no tax and will derive no tax benefit from a scheme of this kind.

A more serious problem is the large number of people on very low incomes—who are in debt in many cases—and the many people who are in the benefits system. The Government have understood, particularly in relation to work, the extent and difficulty of the poverty trap: as people work more, they lose benefit and run into tax threshold problems, and there is a disincentive to work. The Government have begun to address those difficulties, but there is a similar poverty trap in relation to savings, as represented by the capital limits. The Government have shown no move so far to address that problem.

I recall addressing that point to the Paymaster General more than a year ago, and he promised us a comprehensive review of the savings trap for low-income savers. Nothing has been said about it. Judging by the development of Government policy—particularly the growth of means testing for the elderly—all the signs are that the poverty trap for low-income savers will become more, rather than less severe.

I hope that the Economic Secretary will tell us what the Government plan to do in parallel with ISAs to deal with the problem of savings for those who are not tax beneficiaries. That also links to the question of CAT marking. I have spent a lot of time talking to people who are in the specialist business of trying to market savings instruments to low-income savers. Pearl—a company that has a niche in that area—has been mentioned. The friendly societies also do so. Over and again, those providers of means of saving to low-income families say that, to do the job, they have to do it on a house-to-house basis. They collect regular, small-scale contributions and offer advice with their products. That cannot be done within the charges limits that the CAT system operates. It is a major disincentive, which is why the Economic Secretary to the Treasury will find that friendly societies will not offer CAT-marked ISAs. Perhaps, in her reply, the hon. Lady can summarise the evidence that she has received from that group of providers in response to her consultation.

CAT marking has been dealt with, but it is important to emphasise that many of the reservations about the principle have been expressed not merely by those who have a vested interest but by objective analysts. I do not know whether the Economic Secretary to the Treasury has seen the evidence supplied by the Consumers Association—a totally impartial body that caters particularly to middle and low-income savers. It makes the explicit point that, while it is a strong supporter of benchmarking and product rating, it is nervous about the idea of CAT-marking ISAs. It feels that awarding kite marks may lead to a false confidence on the part of consumers that ISAs are suitable for them at all times and in all circumstances. The Government must reflect carefully, given the force of the objections from such bodies.

Finally, some of our growing reservations about the way in which the ISA system is being implemented concern its budgetary implications. Some time ago, we asked a City accountant, together with the House of Commons Library, to estimate what the change in the tax system would mean for the budget over the next five years. We came up with a global figure of about £3 billion to £5 billion in savings to the Treasury as a result of the shift from TESSAs and PEPs to ISAs. I want some sign from the Government as to their arithmetic. If there will be substantial savings, clearly the Government could respond to many of the concerns expressed in the debate. They could rescind the ceiling, for example, and provide more generous bounties to people at the low-income end of the savings bracket. It is important that we have confirmation from the Treasury of its estimate of the impact of the reform on total tax take.

11.16 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): First, I must declare an interest as the chairman of an investment management business that offers PEPs.

When the Government announced their proposed changes, they made it clear that their key objective was to offer something that would be attractive to the less well off—to lower income groups. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury also argued that the new arrangements were not motivated by the desire to save the tax cost of the scheme and that they would be redistributive. However, the Green Paper made it abundantly clear that one of the key objectives was to stop the growing tax-loss cost of the old PEPs and TESSAS. Also, the new arrangements will be tax disadvantageous to those paying no income tax or the lowest rate after the loss of the 10 per cent. advance corporation tax refund in 2004.

I cannot understand how the new scheme will be the slightest bit attractive to those in low-income groups. The Economic Secretary argued that many people will use the cash ISA and that the old cash TESSA was unattractive because of the lock-in. We all know that it would not have been a problem to abolish the lock-in on the TESSA. That is a false argument and, if it is the sole argument on which the Government base their case, it is a pretty poor case.

The attitude of the industry has been illustrated in tonight's speeches. In the main, it is, "Let's get on with it. We've got to make it work. We've got to do the best." However, without party political prejudice, the industry in general regards ISAs as an inferior product to the old PEPs and TESSAs. The ISA has one advantage, which is the wider flexibility of equity investment. The rules on PEP equity investment—and for that matter on bond investment—had little logic.

I want to highlight some mechanical problems. The principal stupidity is that two different systems will run in parallel, with all the costs and problems that that will involve. Even the advantage of flexibility will be undone by the need for parallel vehicles to meet the PEP rules and the ISA rules. Client reporting will differ for ISA clients and PEP clients. Reporting to the Inland Revenue will also change, and that will add extra administration costs. The mini and maxi schemes are quite

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incomprehensible to most of the industry. How on earth the Government can believe that someone passing through a supermarket will understand them, I simply cannot imagine. As has been said, virtually all supermarkets have made it clear that they will not offer ISAs, although the Government's key message was that supermarkets would sell ISAs.

I am greatly relieved that the Government have climbed down on their half-baked proposals to CAT-mark indexed schemes. That would have sent investors a most unwise message. As the pension trustees of the House of Commons pointed out to me recently, indexed investment is likely to perform less well in bad markets, although it may outperform in good markets. There are arguments both ways, but to favour one over the other would have been foolish.

I broadly welcome CAT-marking principles, if they merely show that a product is reasonably and fairly priced, and properly run. I have written to the Economic Secretary with a question, but I have received no reply in a month. The proposals for cash ISAs seem most peculiar in that they give deliberate advantage to large, cartelised banks and building societies. America has been successful in developing money funds to compete with banks and to improve people's returns. The CAT marks will apply to money ISAs in relation to the rates of interest that they will pay, not the charges. That means that only a bank or a building society will be able to provide a CAT-marked cash ISA. The Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds has confirmed that money funds—no matter how cheap and efficient—cannot qualify for CAT marking. Will the Economic Secretary clarify that point? If it is correct, it seems wrong in principle. A major objective should be competition with the banks, which will drive down their charges and drive up their competitiveness.

The change does not meet the Government's original targets. The Opposition want more and more people to own capital, not fewer and fewer. I should like to see a real fiscal incentive for those who have lower incomes. Perhaps some subsidisation would be appropriate if the Government mean what they said about increasing wide ownership of capital.

11.22 pm

Ms Hewitt: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall reply to this interesting debate. Just as the president of the Confederation of British Industry yesterday dismissed the views of the shadow Chancellor on the public finances, so the savings industry does not share in the cynicism and nit picking that we have heard from the Opposition. The industry is getting on with making ISAs a success. Virgin Direct says that individual savings accounts combine the most attractive elements of personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts, and that CAT-marked ISAs are likely to have wide appeal. Midland bank says that the new scheme has features that will attract many new savers, particularly those with smaller amounts to invest. Fidelity says that 80 per cent. of its PEP and TESSA holders are considering investing in ISAs.

Some 200 managers are already approved by the Inland Revenue, a point raised by the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn). Another 100 have applied for a help visit from the Revenue. From April, ISAs will be available by phone and mail, through the internet and by personal application.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) raised the specific point about the savings disincentive, something that we are considering in the context of the pensions review. That is not an issue for that half of the population with savings below £200 for the simple reason that a means-tested benefit results in a savings disincentive—a benefit reduction—only if savings are £3,000 or more. It is obviously a concern for people, particularly elderly people, with savings at that level, but it is not an issue for those who have little or no savings.

With the help of consultation, we have achieved what we set out to do with ISAs and CAT standards, which is to overcome so many of the barriers that stand in the way of people who, at the moment, have little or no savings—the many not the few; the people who are of concern to Labour. They are the people who will particularly benefit from the new ISAs and CAT standard regime; they are the people whom the new regime is designed to assist.

As there have been some unfair implications this evening, I end by paying tribute to civil servants at the Treasury and the Inland Revenue who have worked so hard with the industry to ensure that the scheme will be the success that we believe it will. I hope that, in future debates on the subject, Conservative Members will join me in welcoming the extension of safe savings products to low-income and below-average-income savers and potential savers in Britain.

11.26 pm

Mr. Gibb: This has been a short but important debate on the regulations which dismantle the PEP and TESSA reliefs and replace them with the inadequate ISA regimes.

Just to put the record straight, I do not receive any money from the Institute of Chartered Accountants; I pay it an annual membership fee.

We have heard an enormous amount of complacent language from the Economic Secretary. She insists that ISAs will attract more savers, yet refuses to give a target date for achieving the 6 million new savers. She talks about consultation, but it is clear from her response that she has not listened to people's concerns about complexity, cost and the lack of tax relief, and she is not even listening to me now.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton), in a well-informed contribution to which the Economic Secretary would have done well to listen, pointed out that we now have an inferior savings scheme, introduced all in the name of producing a new scheme for the new Labour Government. He was right to point out that the 6 million target has somehow been dropped tonight on the road to 2 December.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), in a short but high-quality contribution, talked about the highly successful TESSA and PEP schemes, which have added £60 billion to savings in Britain. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who is not in his place now, as he was not at the beginning

of the debate—*[Interruption.]* I apologise; he is present. He pointed out that people initially well disposed to ISAs have now become disillusioned with them. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) rightly pointed out that a key motive in abolishing PEPs was to reduce the tax relief costs, which is what the Chief Secretary said in March.

Two months after coming to power, the Government began their assault on savings. A £5 billion a year tax on people's pension funds was followed a few months later by an announcement of the end of PEPs and TESSAs, which inflicted a colossal cost in reducing people's confidence in the continuity of tax incentives to save. The initial £50,000 lifetime limit and the retrospective element to the change in the reliefs caused people to believe that the savings regimes were no longer to be relied upon for the long term.

Long-term confidence is the key to a successful policy. The Government's savings policy has resulted in a huge drop in the savings ratio—from 10.5 per cent. when they came to office to 7.75 per cent. now. The Prime Minister claimed that 6 million new savers would result from ISAs, but the savings industry believes that ISAs are over-complex, expensive to administer and offer tax relief that barely covers the charges. ISAs are unattractive to non-taxpayers and to basic-rate taxpayers—the very people whom the Government claim to want to encourage. They are unattractive to supermarkets, insurance companies and the public.

Many people now believe that we should keep PEPs and TESSAs. Their abolition was an act of wanton vandalism that has damaged savings. I urge the Government to withdraw the regulations or, at the very least, delay them for a further year. That would give them time to put right the regulations, and industry time to upgrade their IT systems. In the meantime, I urge the House to vote against these badly thought-through regulations.

Question put:-

The House divided: Ayes 116, Noes 293.

Division No. 374] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Sir David Madel.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald

Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Malleber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly negatived.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Meat and Livestock Commission Levy (Variation) Scheme (Confirmation) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 21st July, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Local Government (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 21st July, be approved.

That the draft Health and Safety at Work (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 23rd July, be approved.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMME (1998–2000)

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8238/98, a Commission Communication on its proposed Social Action Programme for 1998–2000; supports the Government's view that the Programme rightly places jobs at the heart of its framework for action; and also supports the Government's intention to give due consideration to specific Commission proposals as they come forward.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Ordered.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

That the Environmental Assessment (Forestry) Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 1731), dated 21st July 1998, a copy of which was laid before this House on 23rd July, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

CATTLE DATABASE

That the Cattle Database Regulations 1998 (S.I., 1998, No. 1796), dated 20th July 1998, a copy of which was laid before this House on 27th July, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

Paul Edwards

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

11.42 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I begin by welcoming the Minister to his new role. I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight the problems faced by my constituent, Margaret Edwards, and others, who, as lone carers, work hard to look after their disabled children at home. Paul Edwards is totally immobile, and suffers from severe cerebral palsy and epilepsy. He requires constant care. Margaret has devoted a large part of her adult life to caring for him, and has sought available assistance by presenting the compelling facts connected with Paul's needs, rather than merely complaining about the very difficult situation that she and Paul face daily.

I think that we would all accept that the birth of a child lays a responsibility on the parents. Equally, it can be easily accepted that, if a child is severely disabled, the parent's responsibilities become much harder to meet. How much more must that be so in the case of a parent who has to care for a disabled child alone.

Margaret Edwards's plight, sadly, is not unique; but it is true that many people in her position might feel, with some justice, that they could not avoid putting their child into some form of permanent institutional care. Margaret Edwards has resisted that option throughout the 19 years for which she has cared for her son, but circumstances have made her choice increasingly unsustainable. I have been doing what I can to assist Margaret and Paul since I entered the House, and have seen at first hand the tremendous efforts that Paul's mother has made to offer him something approaching a normal existence.

At every stage, Paul's mother has made great efforts, on her own, to keep Paul at home and to give him proper care. I corresponded with Motability, and, although progress was made, Margaret Edwards sacrificed her existing car, which meant that she could no longer collect friends to see her and Paul, and took out a loan to purchase a vehicle capable of taking a wheelchair and occupant without transfer. She could only afford an older vehicle, and it has generated its own costs and problems. We worked together to seek timely assistance from the local social services department, and I pay tribute to the devoted staff there.

By the time Paul was 16, he weighed the same as his mother—nine stone—and Margaret Edwards found it increasingly difficult to deal with the average number of 33 lifts that were required each day to cater for Paul's needs. Special adaptations have been made to Paul's home, but it has always taken time, and carers like Margaret find it increasingly difficult to wait—sometimes for years—for practical support of that kind.

I am keen for the House to consider the plight of my constituent, not least because—as Margaret has acknowledged—she is not in a unique situation. We know that many families are held together by the largely unsung work of carers. The Carers National Association has advised me that there are an estimated 5.7 million carers throughout the United Kingdom—about one in eight people. The majority of those carers provide limited assistance, but some 1.7 million provide 20 hours of care or more a week.

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

To highlight the position of Margaret Edwards, it is worth recording that the number of carers who care single-handedly has increased over the past few years, and that more than a third of carers carry out their task without outside help. As I have said, there are a considerable number of lone carers, and they deserve our special attention.

Paul is now 19, and has left school. Although his school years were also difficult for his mother—especially during the long holidays—the problems, particularly financial, have worsened considerably since Paul entered adulthood. It is likely that, if he were not severely disabled, he would be preparing to leave home and make his way in the world; his mother would be able to take up full-time employment again, if she wished, and broaden the scope of her life with new pastimes and a wider circle of friends. All that is denied to both Paul and his mother.

Although Paul attended a day centre, its working hours are less than normal school hours. Margaret Edwards found herself in a grim "Catch 22" situation. Because of her caring role and the fact that Paul will never be able to support himself, she was unable to work enough hours to earn enough to be fully independent and get off income support. Indeed, when she had to have an operation and go into hospital, and was thereafter recuperating, after four weeks her benefits were stopped, and her income was reduced to £40 a week. She also discovered that she was not entitled to respite care for the ensuing two years.

In the past, the Government have expressed their desire to review the social security system, with specific regard to provision for disabled people and their carers. Unfortunately, my correspondence with the Department of Social Security and others on Margaret Edwards's behalf leaves me concerned that the special problems experienced by lone carers may be overlooked. Indeed, a number of ministerial answers contain suggestions that go very little way towards appreciating, let alone addressing, the needs of lone carers.

One suggestion was that Paul might benefit from the social fund towards one-off expenses that he might need to meet. Most expenses that are associated with Paul's care are certainly not one-off. Carpets must be replaced frequently, and special bedroom and bathroom equipment purchased, most of which will probably have a definite life span.

One of Paul's particular needs was for an adjustable bed. His mother approached the social fund for support. I am glad to say that help was forthcoming, but Margaret was told that the fund did not normally provide finance for such equipment, and certainly not for items costing more than around £500; it is worth noting that specialist care equipment is very expensive, and physical adaptations will often be required to the carer's home to ensure that it is safely installed.

However, what carers mainly want is not charitable handouts, although any help is appreciated. Rather, lone carers such as Paul's mother would prefer to have a benefit and tax system that supported them in their desire to seek employment, where possible, and to lead normal, or near to normal, lives, while at the same time maintaining responsibility for their dependent relative.

Carers relieve the state and the rest of society of much cost and responsibility: the state is saved an estimated £34 billion a year as a result. A recent study by London Economics found that small changes in the number of carers could have a profound economic effect. The same study found that, with increasing opportunity costs of caring, fewer people were likely to care, but we all have a responsibility to people such as Margaret Edwards, who give up their lives to care full time for disabled and sick relatives.

Returning to the suggestion that applications to the social fund, for example, address anything other than limited short-term needs, I quote from a letter sent to me by Margaret Edwards:

"As for applying to the Social Fund each time Paul or I need 'extras' for the home, this is precisely the point carers are trying to make, and which the Government continue to fail to understand. We are NOT unemployed people, and do not want to spend the rest of our lives living off charity. We want to be given full recognition, with a recognised wage, consistent with the work we do, and the actual costs of our disabled relative's needs and cost of special equipment, as well as our quality of life (or rather lack of it!)"

Lone carers such as Margaret face additional problems, which are faced by anyone dealing with a difficult domestic situation on their own. As I have described, she literally cannot afford to fall ill, or fail in her commitment to Paul. It will no doubt be said that schemes of respite care are available that should enable Paul to receive adequate care while his mother takes a break, but the reality, certainly in East Sussex, is that respite care centres are often called on to deal with admissions, perhaps in the mental health sector, which cause a shortage of space for people such as Paul, and may create an unsuitable environment for young disabled people.

Respite care that might be available only once every few weeks is not sufficient to give Margaret Edwards the support she needs. In her case, the weekend placement had at least once to be cancelled without notice because of a problem involving another client at the respite care home.

It appears that, although carers as a whole deserve increased support, the position of lone carers vis-a-vis couples does discriminate against the former. The earnings limit for single carers on income support and invalid care allowance should be the same as that for married or partner carers who are not in receipt of income support, but do receive invalid care allowance.

I am frankly humbled by the fortitude and hard work that is shown by carers such as Margaret Edwards. We must remember that such carers relieve society of an enormous administrative and financial burden. Such carers do not seek rewards—merely the tools to do the job that they often willingly take on for themselves and their loved one.

What should be done to help? The Department of Health has talked about a national strategy for carers as part of a broader assessment of the working relationship between health and social services. Such a strategy, if properly resourced, would enjoy wide support among carers and hon. Members on both sides of the House. Lone carers' particular difficulties should be considered at the outset of any such policy discussions. I look forward to hearing from the Minister that any public consultation arising in this sector would be as thorough and wide-ranging as possible.

Such a strategy would add little to the lives of people like Margaret and Paul Edwards unless it sought to focus resources more closely towards areas of need, and

succeeded, for example, in cutting the average waiting time for special care equipment such as beds and commodes. Such a strategy should also address the need for greater co-ordination between the agencies and professionals with whom both carers and cared for have to deal. That could help further focus resources towards those most in need.

The psychological costs of caring must be reduced by increasing the number of short-term breaks for carers, ensuring that less time is spent organising care, by having more seamless support systems and easier access to that support and improving benefits for carers. The whole question of financial support for carers should be examined. Put more appropriately, the current financial disincentive to be a carer, particularly a lone one such as Margaret Edwards, must be addressed. Margaret Edwards says:

"I feel particular notice should be given to the differences between a lone carer and a family where there is a full-time wage earner as well as the main carer. Almost all of my problems could have been resolved far quicker, and with much less stress, had I not been so dependent upon the current social security system."

My constituent wanted to help herself and care for her son. Let us help to make that hard task easier, and so acknowledge in an appropriate way the great sacrifices made by all carers.

Sadly, any new steps taken to create a carers network or to focus more clearly on the inequitable position of lone carers will come too late for Margaret and Paul Edwards. In a letter dated Monday this week, Margaret tells me that, because of her own poor state of health, she has been forced to take the step that she has fought for so long to avoid—she has had to put Paul into a residential home. As she put it so poignantly:

"I am being very cruel to him, in trying to keep him at home. I just do not have the money to give him a life outside these four walls. From when he comes home from the day centre, he becomes a prisoner in his own home."

Because of the lack of suitable local facilities, Margaret will face an 86-mile round trip to see Paul, and is already worrying about the costs involved. Margaret's feelings of helplessness are summed up clearly when she says:

"'Normal' children are able to visit their parents from time to time. For Paul and I this is not an option. They also have the knowledge that their children are capable of letting them know how they are. I will still have all the emotional trauma that will undoubtedly be there, not knowing if he is being cared for properly, and the knowledge that he is unable to inform me of his feelings. In short, I have to put my complete trust in his carers."

All Margaret Edwards and other carers want is adequate recognition for the work they do and the necessary support to carry out their labour of love. Lone parents deserve our particular support, and I ask the Minister, on behalf of Margaret and Paul and many others, for that support.

11.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his success in securing time to debate this very important subject. I am particularly grateful for his kind words of welcome at the beginning of his thoughtful and constructive speech.

The Government value the role that carers play. We recognise that they play an important part in the fabric of our society. One in eight adults gives informal care and one in six homes has a carer. As the hon. Gentleman correctly said, that means that there are nearly 6 million carers in the United Kingdom today

Carers fulfil a vital role in helping relatives or friends and, without their support, many disabled or elderly people would lose the chance to stay in their own homes or with their own families. Caring is something that touches us all. Most of us will have had some experience, either in our own family, or through friends or colleagues, of illness and disability. We therefore know some of the difficult decisions families face and can appreciate the great responsibilities that carers like Margaret Edwards undertake over long periods of time.

On a number of occasions, the hon. Member for Eastbourne referred specifically to the circumstances in which his constituents, Margaret and Paul Edwards, find themselves. It might be helpful if I make one or two remarks about the case to which he has drawn our attention.

East Sussex social services department has agreed a substantial package of support services for Paul and his mother. As the hon. Gentleman said, the services include attendance five days a week at a day service centre, three nights a week of respite care, a Crossroads sitting service and domiciliary care provided in response to requests from Mrs. Edwards. A social worker has been allocated to the family, who I think has—I stand to be corrected by the hon. Gentleman—developed a very good working relationship with the Edwards family.

Equipment has been provided and adaptations have been made to allow Paul to live at home. He has a wheelchair and a specially contoured bed, and ceiling tracks have been provided to lift him in and out of bed. An application by Mrs. Edwards to extend that system to the bathroom, to replace the hoist currently in use, is being considered by the social services department.

The examples that I have given show that the East Sussex social services department has already provided a range of help to Paul and to Margaret, and I am sure that the department will continue to consider sympathetically any additional requests for help from them.

Most people do not plan to be carers. Moreover, many people who provide care regard themselves not as carers but simply as people providing the love and comfort that comes naturally to them. It is a role that arises from mutual bonds of family, duty and affection, sometimes at significant personal cost to carers themselves.

In recognising the contribution of carers, we should not ignore the fact that families and carers can sometimes feel over-burdened, unaided and unsupported in their task. Government and statutory agencies clearly have a responsibility to listen to carers and ensure that the right support is available for them at the right time. That is why, on 10 June 1998, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that he was asking the then Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) to lead a Government-wide review of measures to help carers as part of a national strategy for carers.

The objective of the national strategy is to bring together a range of initiatives designed to address carers' concerns and to give them support. The strategy's terms of reference include drawing together existing work within government that impacts on carers; taking account

[Mr. John Hutton]

of the emerging findings of the royal commission on long-term care; and assessing whether any key needs have been overlooked.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne has raised the issue of social security benefits and of how the rules and regulations concerning those benefits impact on the lives of carers. I shall specifically address those issues in a moment. First, however, I should like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that we wish to ensure that there is across Government an integrated approach to carers. The strategy is building on work that has already been done in the past 18 months to strengthen links between Departments on carers' issues and is also maintaining a meaningful dialogue with carers' organisations.

I was concerned at parts of the hon. Gentleman's speech, when he seemed to imply that all the problems that carers are now experiencing date from 1 May 1997. They do not. The previous Government had 18 years to deal with some of carers' particularly pressing concerns, and conspicuously failed to do so. On 1 May 1997, the new Government began to start addressing those issues.

The national strategy for carers is built around ensuring that carers' concerns are no longer ignored. Our approach is both inclusive and flexible. The Government are involving in our work on the issue carers' organisations, carers themselves, recipients of care, representatives of the statutory services, various Departments and people from industry and commerce.

On 30 July, my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State chaired a meeting of Ministers from Departments with an interest in meeting carers' needs. That was the first ministerial meeting ever held specifically on carers' needs. Ministers decided that, within the strategy, work will be undertaken on four specific themes: respite—to which the hon. Member for Eastbourne referred; employment issues; community networks; and meeting health needs.

Working groups to examine each of the four themes have now been established and have all met at least once. The groups each include representatives from key stakeholder groups. Additionally, however—to capture the views of an even wider range of people—next week, there will be in London a full-day UK consultative conference at which we shall discuss how the needs of carers might be better met. Those invited include Ministers and other representatives from both this House and the other place; people from both national and local carers' organisations; representatives of local government; industry and commerce; representatives of religious and ethnic minority groups; and—most important of all—individual carers who have written to tell us about the issues that concern them most.

I deal now with social security benefits and the national carers strategy. The strategy will be taking a critical look at all aspects of invalid care allowance and the other benefits that support carers in their valuable role. We will want to see what is currently available, how well the benefits meet the needs of carers and what changes may be appropriate for the future. It is too early to say what the results of that examination will be, but we expect to include any proposals in the strategy's consultation document. I assure the hon. Gentleman that that consultation process will be wide and meaningful.

Nevertheless, social security benefits already make a substantial contribution, whether directly or indirectly, towards informal care. As well as specific provision for carers in their own right through invalid care allowance—which will, incidentally, exceed £830 million in 1998–99, topped up, for those less well off, with income-related benefits—in excess of £24 billion goes towards the income replacement and extra costs needs of long-term sick and disabled people.

Despite that level of spending, there are undoubtedly unmet needs. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security recently announced the latest stages of the process of reforming the welfare state. The Government are determined to help disabled people, and, by extension, those who care for them, especially where the carer and the cared for live in the same home, as is the case with the Edwards family.

We want to help disabled people get back into work. To achieve that, we have announced our intention to modernise incapacity benefit, so that it provides information on what people can do, not what they cannot do, and to help people plan their return to work.

We also intend to introduce a single work-focused gateway. It will help sick and disabled people and their carers consider opportunities for work through personal advisers and a common entry point for all benefits. That will help to improve the service that we give our clients and help them avoid benefit dependency. At the moment, too many claimants experience duplication and confusion. We need to tailor our services to provide a more personalised and professional service and seek to help people become more independent. Obviously, if a carer's duties are particularly onerous, an immediate focus on work would be inappropriate, but we do not intend that people will lose access to their personal adviser.

Also, we are going to provide security for those disabled people who cannot work. We will focus that help on those in the greatest need by introducing the disability income guarantee—a new increase in income support for those severely disabled adults and children with the greatest needs. We expect that some 145,000 adults and 25,000 children will benefit from the disability income guarantee from April 2001. We shall also be reforming the severe disablement allowance so that it provides greater help to those who become disabled early in life, and we shall be extending to children aged three and four the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance.

In conclusion, the strategy will be ready for consultation early in 1999. We already know from the research available to us and from the many letters that people send us that carers' main needs are the means to have a break, recognition of the importance of their role, reliable and satisfactory services, relief from social isolation, and information.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising some very important issues, both for carers and for those whom they care, and for the constructive tone of many of his remarks. I assure him that his views will be fed into the strategy process. If we, as a Government, can help to meet the needs of carers, then we shall have succeeded in making a very important contribution to improving the quality of life of many of our citizens.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 11 November 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

European Union (Defence Policy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

9.33 am

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): At the end of this debate, for the first time, at your request and indeed instruction, Madam Speaker, the House will observe the two-minute silence while the House is sitting. It is appropriate that we are debating defence in the context of Europe. It is also appropriate that we should mark the 80th anniversary of the armistice, which followed a 100-day campaign of victory by the greatest land force ever assembled by this country.

Contrary to popular myth, that was a highly professional, well-led and supported military force which comprehensively defeated an aggressive, expansionist and militaristic enemy. That army was a citizen's army. It, and the professional army from which it grew, had paid a fearful price to achieve a world war-winning level of competence. We should be proud of their achievement.

We will also remember the price that was paid by hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens and by millions of our fellow European citizens in the wars that have scarred this continent this century. That is why I believe that defence remains the most important responsibility of any Government, and it reminds us of the importance of today's debate.

I put in for this debate because something is happening with defence policy in the European Union and the House has not been told. Now is the chance. We look forward to the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for Defence in the anticipation that it will be followed by a two-minute silence not only of remembrance, but, I hope, of stunned astonishment that we have learnt something from him about the Government's European policy.

On 1 July, the *Financial Times* reported:

"Tony Blair has recognised that his ambition of carving a powerful role for the UK within the European Union could take 10 years and has commissioned a sweeping review of the UK's approach to the EU.

Officials said it was crucial for the UK to demonstrate it favoured closer integration in a number of areas, such as foreign and defence policies."

On 2 October, we seemed to have arrived at the conclusion of that exercise, when the extremely well-informed Robert Peston of the *Financial Times* reported:

"The government is putting the finishing touches to a blueprint on Europe, which it hopes will pave the way for Britain to play a leading role alongside France and Germany.

The blueprint includes a controversial recommendation that the European Union should assume a defence capability—a move which would signal the biggest shift in policy since Labour took office.

Mr. Blair . . . is expected to make a decision ahead of this month's EU summit where member states will discuss the future of the Union.

To this end, the Foreign Office, with guarded support from the Ministry of Defence, is recommending that the Western European Union, the EU's embryonic defence arm, should be scrapped."

Those reports did not pass unnoticed. They were raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) in the strategic defence review debate, but they were not referred to specifically by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence in his reply on each day of those debates, so imagine our surprise on reading *The Times* headline of 21 October:

"Britain to back defence role for Europe."

One might have been forgiven for thinking that the article could have been reporting our debate, but no. Philip Webster reported:

"Britain is prepared for the first time to give the European Union a defence arm that would allow members' troops to co-operate in mounting military operations, the Prime Minister signalled last night.

Tony Blair made plain that he was ready to drop Britain's longstanding objections to the EU having a defence capability".

As the House was debating defence at 4.30 on Tuesday 20 October, the Prime Minister was talking to journalists from six leading European newspapers, including *The Times*, *Le Monde* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

Just in case anyone tries to suggest that Philip Webster was exaggerating what the Prime Minister was saying, let me point out that, following that interview, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that

"the Blair Government has decided to give its European partners a pleasant surprise for once. The informal meeting of "Heads of Government in Pörtschach at the weekend will provide the setting."

It said that the Prime Minister

"announced for the first time that London would abandon Britain's long-standing opposition to a firmer structure to Common Foreign and Security Policy."

That means that London will no longer oppose the appointment of a Mr. CFSP. That is not exactly news, as the previous Conservative Government, in their 1996 White Paper, said that they were ready to look at the idea of appointing a single figure to represent the policy of the Union to the outside world. I assume that the Labour Government have picked up Conservative policy in this area, as they have done in many other areas. When they followed Conservative policy on the economy, they did rather well; having abandoned it, they are in trouble.

Perhaps the Government should re-examine their policy on the Territorial Army and follow Conservative policy. We very much regret the rumours about an announcement in the House next Monday on the Territorial Army, some three weeks before the Army is ready for that. It is

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

disgraceful that the announcement is being dragged forward to get it out of the way before Prorogation, much to the danger of the TA.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On what does the hon. Gentleman base his speculation about an announcement next Monday?

Mr. Blunt: I was informed by someone in the BBC—presumably a most reliable source.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Defence answered two parliamentary questions on the matter yesterday—as reported in *Hansard* this morning—and confirmed that there will be a statement on the Territorial Army next week.

Mr. Blunt: It is much to be regretted that the Army is having to drag forward any announcement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): Why is the hon. Gentleman complaining about the matter being brought early to the House? In view of all the ill-informed speculation, I would expect him to want the House to be informed. Why is he complaining about the House being given early information? I fail to follow his logic.

Mr. Blunt: It is very simple—a most ungainly exercise is taking place inside the Territorial Army, as different parts of the Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association and different regions are engaging in what my local TAVRA representative referred to as "horse trading" over which units would be placed where, which would survive and which TA centres would be sold. The speed with which this is happening means that the TA will be left inadequately staffed. We regret the fact that the Government are taking no notice of the unanimous recommendation of the Select Committee on Defence that they should think again because their policy is misconceived. However, this is a diversion from European Union defence policy, to which I shall now return.

The previous Conservative Government had accepted a Mr. CFSP—a Mr. PESC in France. As the German for "common foreign and security policy" is "gemeinsame aussen und sicherheitspolitik", the Germans are happy to have a Herr GASP—or perhaps a Fraulein GASP.

Although the news about a Mr. CFSP was not news, the conclusion drawn by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* from the Prime Minister remarks was. It said:

"In the medium term, London is therefore now also questioning the role of the Western European Union . . . to which 10 or the 15 EU Member States belong. For as soon as the European Union adopts its own 'security policy identity', which the British government no longer intends to oppose, the WEU would become superfluous. Its political role would fall"—

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): The hon. Gentleman has referred to the debates on 24 and 25 October, but I want to quote back to him what was said by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. At a meeting at which I was present, my right hon. Friend said:

"Nato must remain the cornerstone of European defence but Britain would consider reinforcing the Western European Union"—

the very point—

Mr. Key: Carry on with the quote.

Mr. Cunliffe: I am going to do that.

My right hon. Friend continued:

"creating a more distinct European dimension within NATO or even merging the WEU and the EU."

Perhaps the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) would respond to that. A week after my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the remarks quoted by the hon. Gentleman, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence was quite clear on what the exercise was all about.

Mr. Blunt: I look forward to hearing from the Under-Secretary of State exactly what the Government are up to. The House should have the benefit of a clarification of the Government's policy. That is what this debate is about and I look forward to the Under-Secretary's response to it.

I was quoting the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. It stated:

"The WEU would become superfluous. Its political role would fall to the EU and its military role to NATO. Blair's ideas are supported by the Foreign Office and Defence Ministry, although the latter has certain reservations."

We look forward to hearing what those are. It continued:

"In the long term, this would mean the establishment of something akin to a European Foreign and Defence Ministry."

Le Monde directly asked the Prime Minister:

"Do you support the idea of abolishing the WEU and transferring its military resources to NATO?"

He replied:

"There are all kinds of ideas and many admit that the WEU is less than the ideal instrument which we need. I believe that we must think in a more imaginative way than we are doing."

That is hardly a ringing endorsement of the WEU. What conclusion are people supposed to draw about the future of the WEU from those remarks?

The Prime Minister is considering a very substantial change which, in the light of the Amsterdam treaty, would stand the whole of the Government's approach on its head. I wonder whether other Ministers knew of it. There are rumours of Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence papers for and against the ideas suggested—yet, when Defence Ministers were debating defence in this House, particular points were put to them, but they were unable to say whether those ideas were being considered.

Mr. Spellar: I am aware that the best way to keep a secret in this country is to make a speech on the Floor of the House. I refer the hon. Gentleman to column 1176 of *Hansard* on 20 October, where I dealt precisely with the points raised by the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples).

Mr. Blunt: I read those remarks carefully because I had assumed that the Under-Secretary would deal with the

matter. However, they do not bear any resemblance to what the Prime Minister was saying on the same day to journalists from *The Times* and other European newspapers.

Mr. Spellar: Can the hon. Gentleman tell me what incompatibility he perceives between my comments at column 1176 and what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said?

Mr. Blunt: Yes. The Prime Minister spoke about the potential abolition of the Western European Union, but there was no suggestion of that in the Under-Secretary's remarks in the House. He spoke about the importance of NATO in European defence, and we all agree with that. However, the institutional framework in which NATO will operate and the relationship with the European Union are central to the issue. The problem is that the Prime Minister is dealing with a big idea, but he has no idea of the detail. Indeed, I shall shortly put some detailed points to the Under-Secretary. When we debated defence, what did the Under-Secretary know about the proposals for the WEU? What does he know about them now?

The Prime Minister's Cabinet colleagues were caught unsighted. The Minister for the Cabinet Office initially denied, in this House, that the Prime Minister had even briefed Philip Webster. He then retreated behind the solecism that it was not a briefing, but an interview on the record—a distinction lost on the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which described the meeting with the Prime Minister as "a pre-summit briefing".

The Leader of the House said that the Prime Minister was simply saying that he wanted some imaginative thinking on how to enhance the European contribution to NATO. If that is what the French thought the Prime Minister was up to, he would have got extremely short shrift at the summit in Austria. What is certainly the case is that Members of this House did not know what the Prime Minister was doing. I raised the issue in our debate on the Army, but did not have the benefit of a response from the Under-Secretary. I raised it through an early-day motion, to which I have had no reply. The Under-Secretary's colleagues, the hon. Members for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) raised the matter on the Floor of the House, and asked for a statement and an explanation.

The Times also quoted the Prime Minister as saying:

"All I am saying is that we need to allow fresh thinking and it is important for Britain to be part of that thinking . . . and not for us simply to stand there and say 'we are not part of this'."

May I suggest something revolutionary? What about Parliament being exposed to this fresh thinking? Although we look forward to the Under-Secretary's reply, we probably need the Prime Minister here to answer the debate. The Prime Minister may think that his colleagues do not need to be aware of his proposals, but the House should be made aware of them.

In the Prime Minister's absence, it is a pity that—I say this with due respect to the Under-Secretary of State for Defence—the Minister for the Armed Forces will not be replying to this debate, as his experience as the Minister with responsibility for Europe and the man who signed the Amsterdam treaty would equip him admirably to provide that reply. Then again, as a fellow Oxford-educated public schoolboy socialist, the Under-Secretary may have the advantage of having a clearer insight into the Prime Minister's thought processes. In the absence of a communiqué from the summit in Austria, where ideas and proposals were floated by our Prime Minister, and in the absence of any statement to the House, we seek guidance.

My approach to the Minister is made in a spirit of genuine inquiry. What is going on? We can hardly be blamed for being suspicious. Are the proposals merely an exercise in image building—an attempt to curry favour with our partners? Are they, as I fear, concession of a substantial position and the British interest, with no substantive proposals, strategy or endgame in mind? They seem horribly reminiscent of other of the Government's constitutional proposals—which sound good, but are out of control and are damaging once battle is joined over the detail, when Ministers belatedly discover that the initiative has passed to those who do not share the United Kingdom's agenda.

I hope that the Minister will answer some specific questions. Are the Amsterdam arrangements for the relationship between NATO, the WEU and the EU to be reviewed? If so, why? The arrangements have hardly begun. Why cannot the arrangements be given a chance to bed down and to work?

Perhaps the Minister can tell us when the Amsterdam treaty came into force or will come into force. I have been unable to ascertain the date. The treaty states that it will come into force

"on the first day of the second month following that in which the instrument of ratification is deposited by the last signatory State to fulfil that formality."

The Minister will know, or certainly should know, that that date is important, as the protocol to article J.7 of the treaty states:

"The European Union shall draw up, together with the Western European Union, arrangements for enhanced cooperation between them within a year from the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam."

Has that happened yet? Are the Government's proposals part of that process? If so, surely scrapping the Western European Union is hardly consistent with the treaty of Amsterdam.

When does the Minister believe that the next intergovernmental conference will be held to negotiate the new treaty which will do away with the Western European Union and rewrite the treaty of Amsterdam? Will he tell us what he believes to be the future of the WEU?

In the proposals, how are the aspirations of the neutral countries that are already inside the EU to be accommodated? Are the Government prepared to concede that the structure should be in the second, or CFSP, pillar of the European Union? If the WEU is no longer to exist, does it matter whether it is in the second or fourth pillar? What are the issues at stake?

Has any thought been given to enlargement? If the EU comes with an explicit security guarantee, will not that cause problems for the Baltic states? Would not an implicit security guarantee far more effectively enhance their security, without the risk of provoking Russia, which will be in God knows what condition in 10 years?

If we are to have a single money and a single economy—something to which the Government are, in principle, committed—why do we not move towards a common defence policy, and not least down the road of

[Mr. Blunt]

defence specialisation, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats? Although such a policy would be the end of our ability to act independently, it would force us to face up to the fact that, if economic and monetary union is not to fall apart, democratically accountable institutions have to be created at the European level to deal with issues of wealth redistribution, fiscal policy, macro economic policy and monetary policy. Why should such institutions not be created to deal with defence as well? It is the logical end of the path that the Prime Minister is taking us down.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): My hon. Friend is making an extremely good case on why we should be given a better explanation. From his own experience in both the forces and the Ministry of Defence as a special adviser, can he think of any occasion in the recent past on which a common defence policy, if one had been created, would have affected our capabilities? Does he think that we as a country would have been able to act as well and effectively as we did in the Gulf, for example, if we had had a common defence policy, as is now being described?

Mr. Blunt: The short answer is no; neither in the Gulf war nor in the Falkland Islands would we have been able to act as effectively. If we had had a common defence and common defence forces in the absence of common democratic structures at the European level to direct those forces, those events certainly would not have happened. If we had had European-level direction—which we shall assume was democratically accountable, within the United States of Europe, about which some Labour Members are probably enthusiastic—would it have been prepared to support the United States in the Gulf? Would it have been prepared to support the United Kingdom's interests in the Falklands Islands? I think that those questions would have been answered in the negative.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The hon. Gentleman will recall that, when the Falklands war broke out and there was some havering in Washington, on the first morning after war started, the first national leader to telephone Mrs. Thatcher to offer her complete and unconditional support was President Mitterrand. He immediately provided to the Ministry of Defence details of how the Exocet missiles were organised and operated. The great complaint was that British arms exporters were running to their clients in Arab countries saying, "You can't trust the French; they'll give away the details of their Exocets. Buy British, not French."

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful for that intervention. The hon. Gentleman's comments are perfectly correct; the French did us an enormous favour in allowing the fleet to exercise against Super Etendards equipped with Exocets on their way down to Ascension island. However, had the Spanish and Italian Governments been part of a European set-up, how keen would they have been to support the policy of retaking the Falkland Islands from the Argentines? It begs the question of what capability the United Kingdom would have had to act in recovering our possessions.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way a second time, especially as we are dealing with a slight distraction from his main theme. Leaving aside the Falklands—although we could discuss the mechanics who were assisting in servicing the Super Etendards that were flying against the British fleet during the Falklands war—does he recall Mitterrand's actions, up to the 59th minute of the 11th hour, in undermining western diplomacy against Iraq in the Gulf, and also the assistance that the Belgian Government gave us? Mitterand sent a delegation to Iraq about one day before war broke out, contrary to the policy of the other western Governments, and the Belgians failed to supply us with ammunition, because they thought that doing so might upset their Iraqi contracts.

Mr. Blunt: The interventions are extremely interesting, because they demonstrate that different European states have different national interests. I think that the question of whether they can be brought together at some European level would have to be answered in the negative.

We need to know the Government's endgame. If we believe that British independence of action is worth preserving and that our country's alliance with the United States should be central to our foreign and defence policy, we should have some answers to the questions that I have asked the Minister. This is a constitutional adventure too important to be left to the Prime Minister's sound-good politics. His colleagues who have a better eye for detail and the potential pitfalls ahead need to get a grip on the policy. I look forward to hearing that the Ministry of Defence, at least, knows where the policy is headed.

9.58 am

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): I shall concentrate on the new emerging Europe, which introduces a further dimension and perspective that calls for review, although I still accept the common defence policy.

Let me declare my interest as deputy leader of the British delegations to the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. I have spent the past 10 months producing a rapporteur's report on our intelligence section rapid response control and command system, which will be presented to the WEU in Paris in the first week in December. I was, therefore, somewhat alarmed by the statement in October which attempted to define the British review policy.

I hope that the new emerging Europe will play a positive part in establishing peace, stability and security throughout Europe and the world. The current and previous British Governments genuinely supported that aim. I remember the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), clearly and distinctly spelling out his support for the WEU at a conference at Church house about six months before the general election.

In my view, Europe must be a community of free member states. I reject the concept of a European super-state. The European Union must be based on a sharing of national interest and not on the surrender of national identity. That is particularly important in relation to defence.

I see no case for merging the common foreign and security policy into the bureaucratic machinery of Brussels. The establishment of a European army would limit our freedom and flexibility in respect of engagement in any war or military crisis—for example, in Kosovo or

anywhere in the Balkans, which are somewhat volatile at present. However, the nations of Europe need each other. We are interdependent and carry the weight of great trading blocs, so it is imperative that we present a common front to the world. Our foreign and security policy must first be a defining expression of national identity. We must then proceed to unite Europe in a common defence policy while continuing to maintain and safeguard our independent national interest.

In my view, the best way in which to achieve that aim is to strengthen the WEU and give it a more positive role working with the United States, which always has been and, for at least the next 20 years, will continue to be, the cornerstone of our European defence. I see no reason to change something that has worked incredibly well.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will respect the views of all right hon. and hon. Members on defence issues. I believe that we should take an open view on how we should safeguard our future and that of our European colleagues. I make no apologies for having voted—first at the Council of Europe and then at the WEU—in favour of welcoming former eastern bloc and Soviet Union nations.

When I met Vice-President Gore some 18 months ago, we discussed the European dimension. We should bear in mind the fact that America has 300,000 troops in Europe, and that maintaining them there represents an economic problem. It is clear that Russia, Romania, Bulgaria and other emerging nations will have to take a positive role in any European defence system, so it is necessary to review our commitments in Europe. In my view, the WEU should take an important role. It has the experience and expertise, and is modernising its approach, as is clear from my rapporteur's report.

We have always supported the NATO alliance, for which we should be extremely grateful in terms of our security in Europe over the past 40 years. Mainly thanks to NATO, we have seen the total elimination of the Warsaw bloc. Certain former Soviet nations are still haunted by their relations with NATO in the past and, even though they are now co-opted members on certain consultative committees, they remain wary of the United States.

We should be firmly committed to the enlargement of Europe to the east and accept the necessity to embrace and support the new democracies of eastern Europe. We would be foolish not to do so. History will judge us harshly if we leave the door shut in their faces or allow their countries to slide back into totalitarianism. That applies equally to economic and military matters.

NATO and its participating Governments must confront and resolve three issues. The first is the future of the transatlantic relationship. Certain groups in America favour a gradual withdrawal of troops as soon as Europe can take care of itself. Secondly, we must review NATO's wider security function, including its possible use of out-of-area missions. Thirdly we must consider the future of "Partnership for Peace" and the recent NATO enlargement.

We must also redefine the transatlantic relationship so that any British Government, of whatever political disposition, will know which direction to take.

We must also consider NATO's wider security role. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who has a great interest in defence matters, spoke about the role of our defence forces. I have just visited one of our frigates in the Gulf, HMS Cumberland, where I was informed of the importance of having available aircraft which do not have to fly 3,000 miles to a military emergency. Mobility is crucial to the question whether we merge certain parts of the Air Force and the Navy in response to the demand for flexibility.

In conclusion, although certain fundamental changes have not been made, and I have read from A to Z the speech that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made in October, it is clear that there is a flexible approach—

Mr. Blunt: Which of the Prime Minister's speeches has the hon. Gentleman read from A to Z—

Mr. Cunliffe: The one that my right hon. Friend made at the summit at Pörtschach in October—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) is being intervened on. He must wait until the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) has finished speaking before responding to him.

Mr. Blunt: If the hon. Gentleman is giving us an account of what happened at the summit in Austria, which so far has failed to be communicated to the world, we look forward to hearing what it is and what authority it carries.

Mr. Cunliffe: Well, what was said was based on the Amsterdam treaty. The Prime Minister outlined the agreement to modernise and strengthen the system of defence control. Most of the quotations that I have are about a better military capability. There are references to

"more modern, flexible, sustainable and deployable forces"

and

"drawing on the lessons of the success of NATO."

We all agree on that.

Mr. Key: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he has seen the full text of what the Prime Minister said? One of the difficulties is that No. 10, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence have said that there is no verbatim text of the speech. We have all had to rely on press reports. Has the hon. Gentleman obtained a verbatim report?

Mr. Cunliffe: I do not have a verbatim report. I have quotations from Reuters. I assume that Ministers have seen them, in view of what they said the week after, which I quoted earlier. Ministers have made it clear that NATO is the cornerstone of our defence policy. I have already talked about tidying up and modernising. There has to be a flexible response with a review. The breakup of the Warsaw pact has meant that there is now a positive military input from some eastern European countries. We did not have that before.

This is an important debate. I have known the Minister for many years and he deserves his current position. I am sure that he will try to inform the House to the best of his ability of present and future policy, as far as is permissible for security reasons.

10.11 am

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on choosing this subject and having the debate on such an appropriate day for considering defence co-operation in Europe.

I returned yesterday afternoon from a meeting of the Western European Union in Paris, where we were discussing the future of the organisation. The impression given by members from other European countries was very depressing, arising from what the Prime Minister had said. Questions were asked about Britain's future co-operation in the WEU. As I drove back across northern France, past the Somme and Picardy, I thought about the trauma of the experiences 80 years ago and what has been achieved since. Sadly, we have had to fight another world war and, in most of the years since the end of the first world war, British troops have been engaged in active service somewhere in the world. Only one year has passed since then without British troops dying somewhere in the world defending people's rights and freedom.

The great war showed the need for European nations to co-operate. The hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) rightly said—I imagine that most hon. Members and our European partners agree—that, when Britain signed the Amsterdam agreement, we were signing up for a strengthening of the WEU's position in the family of European organisations. Our continued support for the WEU was clearly stated by signing the treaty. There are six organisations covering Europe and our north Atlantic allies, ranging in size from the European Union, with 15 members, to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, with 56 members. The WEU was singled out among those six for special consideration. The Prime Minister was wrong to cast doubt on the future of the WEU.

The Secretary of State for Defence will be with us in Paris at the start of December. I hope that, in the hour or so that he will have to present several topics to the Assembly, he will state the Government's position on the WEU clearly. Anything short of that will give credence to the suggestion that Britain is looking for an alternative based on the EU. I do not regard that as a practical solution. It is fraught with difficulties, it would lead to endless, unnecessary argument and it would destroy a lot of the good will of the countries from the former Soviet bloc that have become associated with the WEU and see it as a focal point for making partnership work. "Partnership for Peace" and many other organisations do not have a cat in hell's chance of long-term success unless the WEU is strengthened.

We have to look around at experience of what organisations can deliver. Colleagues at the WEU considered an interesting report over the past couple of days called "New Prospects for Transatlantic Co-operation in Security and Defence", produced by Mr. Blaauw, vice-chairman of the political committee. He is a much-decorated service man who is now an experienced leading politician in the Netherlands. His report points to some of the issues that are sometimes forgotten, including the difficulty of gaining co-operation for the United States to free up some of NATO's assets for use by the WEU.

We ought to ask the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence to talk to our American allies about greater co-operation with the WEU. Sadly, the Americans are reluctant to do that. It is a pity that they are not more visionary in exploring the opportunities offered by the WEU. Albania, for example, has been ripped apart by strife. NATO and the United Nations could not have gone in, but the WEU did. The policing of Albania by the dark blue berets of the WEU is a significant contribution to bringing some sense to the turmoil there.

The WEU has a real role to play. If European co-operation is to mean more than just co-operation on procurement projects—if it means seeking true partnerships for peace and trying to work out a European dimension for sorting out problems—three things are necessary. First, this House must be paramount in deciding what is in the best defence interests of this country. That should always be discussed here first, not speculated on even by the Prime Minister at conferences elsewhere until he has clearly put his thoughts to the House. Such far-reaching issues, which would have repercussions way outside the United Kingdom, should be dealt with here first.

Secondly, we must make sure that everybody signs up for an organisation that can deliver. The WEU is trying to adapt itself to the new future for Europe. It is trying to accommodate the rights of individual states and make partnership work.

Thirdly, and most importantly for Europe, there must be credibility in Europe for the organisation. The WEU has such credibility. Britain's 36 representatives from all parties and both Houses of Parliament—18 full members and 18 substitutes—have a clear influence in its policy making. As a member of that organisation, I have felt undermined by recent speculation.

Sadly, there has been no attempt to clarify the matter, and this debate is the first opportunity that we have had for that. I hope that the Minister will respond in a robust and up-front manner, and experience suggests that he will defend his position robustly. However, the House will be interested in the factual information that we need.

If we do not get that information today, I am afraid that those hon. Members who are predicting doom and gloom within the WEU—and who are possibly undermining other institutions in Europe—will, sadly, get backing from an unusual source, the British Government. The Government should instead be giving positive backing. They should say that there is a role for the organisation, that Europe does matter, that we want to play a part in it and that we want our role to be within the WEU.

10.20 am

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on introducing this debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), who took part in the debate. It is important that we discuss defence often. I see no problem with what the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence or anyone else says if it means that we have an open discussion. It is healthy to keep all options open, but we should always come here to debate whatever takes place in Europe.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—to return his compliment. However, we have had to drag the Government here, and Labour Members have been asking for Government statements. Surely he dissociates himself

from the fact that the Government have not been prepared to come to the House to make a statement. It has been left to me to drag the Minister here.

Mr. Hoyle: I do not think that the way forward is to score cheap political points, and I shall not enter into that. We want an open debate, and I have confidence that my hon. Friend the Minister will give us clarification.

Members on both sides of the Chamber are never frightened of discussing defence. We have always displayed good, honest views, and that will never change. I am reassured by the statement that NATO must remain the cornerstone of the EU's defence, but that Britain will consider reinforcing the Western European Union, and will try to create a more distinct EU dimension within NATO. We need to be told whether we are to have an EU force, or whether the WEU will continue. I welcome this debate, which gives us the opportunity to discuss whether the changes are essential and whether they will work.

The burden on our forces must be remembered. We have mounted operations in the Falklands and the Gulf, and there are problems within the former Yugoslavia. Time bombs ticks way and explode here, there and everywhere. We may even see problems in the Baltic states—we do not know. British forces, rightly, are at the forefront, and are a shining example of our commitment to peacekeeping in Europe and the world.

I believe that the other European nations have a part to play. They must not just sit back, passing judgment on what is right and wrong. They must not pay lip service when problems erupt in the former Yugoslavia because, as we have seen, we cannot rely on the Americans, who do not wish to have troops on the ground. Our troops will have to be there, and that is a problem. Our troops' lives are being risked—not American troops, although the Americans will pass judgment. If we can bring in other European states and ensure that they play a major role—and that their troops are placed in the hot spots of Europe—I will welcome that. It is crucial that the Minister discusses whether we are to have an EU force or the continuation or expansion of the WEU.

We can have that discussion because we have democracy, and Parliament must retain the ability to discuss that issue. The countries we are sending forces to assist do not have those rights or the ability to enjoy that freedom. We must not lose sight of that.

We all look to Europe for future defence procurement mergers, and companies must merge to compete with the Americans. British Aerospace has said that it needs to ensure its future, and we must produce weapons with a European dimension. We all welcome that, and that is the way forward. Otherwise, we will always be reliant on the Americans.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the critical role that American research and development plays in our programmes? Is he aware that members of the Defence Select Committee, on a recent visit to Washington, were told again and again that the exchange of technology—which is principally beneficial to this country—would not be available if our defence industry became subsumed in a wider European defence industry?

Mr. Hoyle: Of course I welcome our work with the Americans, which will continue. However, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the future large aircraft will come not via the Americans, but via the Europeans. We all beat the drum about the success of the European airbus, and we want to say that the future large aircraft—built in Europe for the world—will have a dual role. European manufacturers have a part to play, but I do not lose sight of our great allies the Americans, and NATO will be the cornerstone of America and the UK.

We need our own defence independence to allow us to fight in the Falklands—if conflict re-emerges—in the Gulf or in Africa, if we decide to try to keep the peace there. I do not want to rely on someone in Europe telling us where we can go. That fear has comes across today, but it is not necessary. I want to reassure everybody that we will have the independence to go wherever we are needed.

Gibraltar is an issue of tactical importance to the UK. We mounted the Falklands and the Gulf operations from there, and we must not allow Spain to come in the back way and take it away from us. We must work together within Europe, and play a leading part in Europe. There is a danger—which has become clear this morning—that the sceptics are allowing their view to cover everything.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is the hon. Gentleman concerned that, given problems such as Gibraltar and Spain's designs on it, there is a danger that the development of a common European foreign and security policy might prevent us from looking after British and Gibraltarian interests?

Mr. Hoyle: No, definitely not. I must rule that out completely. I would not want to follow the example of the previous Government, under whom the people of Hong Kong were given back to China when there was no need. We must not allow that ever to happen again. *[Interruption.]* Hong Kong island was not part of the deal, and we could have held on to it for ever. The previous Government failed to negotiate on behalf of the people of Hong Kong because of their desire to get in bed with the communist Government. After Tiananmen square, the previous Government should have learnt something. They failed to do so. I always say that, if people have no desire to become part of another country, we must not allow that to happen. That is why I stand by the view of the people of Gibraltar, unlike the previous Government who did not stand by the people of Hong Kong, so Conservative Members should not lecture me on that matter. We must remember, and learn from, the previous Government's mistakes.

It is important that we are always willing to discuss, and look at, both sides of the argument and that we arrive at the right decision. Scaremongering is easy, but we should not allow it. There should be open discussion, then we will make the right decision. We can ensure that we look after Europe and that it looks after us. We are a part of it and we must not lose sight of that.

Crucially, we must always remember that British troops will be stretched unless there is some sort of European force—either a WEU or an EU force. British troops are always the first on the ground and they do an excellent job when serving overseas. No one can take that away from them. However, other European nations should tackle some of the problems in Europe instead of leaving it to good old Britain. They have a part to play. Hopefully, as a result of this discussion, or through the

[Mr. Hoyle]

Prime Minister or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence having discussions, we will find a way forward. If we can ensure that we get the right deal for the United Kingdom and our defence forces, I will not have a problem with it, as long as that independence remains. I believe that it will.

10.30 am

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I congratulate my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on his success in obtaining this important debate. I hope that he gets the answers that he sought from the Minister. I also congratulate all those hon. Members who have spoken. As is usual in defence debates, all those who have spoken care and know about the subject.

The House should not have to rely on the Opposition to haul reluctant Ministers to the Dispatch Box. We will haul them here at every opportunity, but how much better it would be if they were less secretive. If the Government were more open, they would not have leaks and the paranoia of the Ministry of Defence over the strategic defence review and the Territorial Army. That gallant soldier, General Sir Michael Walker, Commander-in-Chief, Land Command, would not have to issue letters saying that idle chatter on social occasions about the cuts would imperil military careers, or talk of press revelations eroding trust between military chiefs and "our political masters", and order his troops to avoid

"deliberate contact with the press or politicians".

As the Member of Parliament for Salisbury, I would have a pretty boring time at social events, in my surgeries and elsewhere, if that happened and I regret that it has been necessary for him to say it.

Three weeks ago, the House debated the Government's strategic defence review. At the very moment that the Minister for the Armed Forces was speaking, the Prime Minister was briefing the European press on the future of European defence policy. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister had forgotten to tell the Secretary of State for Defence or, if he had, the latter had forgotten to tell his Ministers who were speaking in the House. That was incompetent. The Prime Minister was incompetent, as was the Secretary of State for Defence. It was a muddle.

The Prime Minister went off to Pörtschach in Austria to tell the leaders of Europe that they were in a muddle over defence. Last week in Vienna, the Secretary of State for Defence tried to sort it all out. He said in his speech there that it was "a one-off informal conference"—it was so informal that he told the press that it was "a defining moment" for defence policy. The Secretary of State was asked about merging the European Union and Western European Union. He said:

"We do not rule it out, but it raises a number of difficulties"—

I'll say it does. He confirmed that other options include:

"merging some elements of the WEU with the EU and associating other elements more closely with NATO, or perhaps creating a more distinct European dimension within NATO."

Just for good measure, he added that one could also envisage

"reinforcing and reinvigorating the WEU".

So, the Prime Minister forgot to talk to the Ministry of Defence, but both he and the Secretary of State for Defence forgot to talk to the Foreign Office. That was also incompetent.

Yesterday, in another place, Government policy on EU-WEU integration was debated. The Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Baroness Symons, said, in column 627 of the *Official Report*:

"The Government are not focusing on institutional changes though these may come."

By column 629, she had warmed up a little and she said:

"the relationship between the WEU and Europe on the one hand and the WEU and NATO on the other is one on which a little more clarity from time to time would be helpful."

And so say all of us. By column 630, she was firing on all cylinders and she said:

"the common strategies developed under CFSP are subject to unanimity vote. However, the common positions which flow from those strategies are subject to qualified majority voting unless they are not covered by a common strategy. I hope that point is clear."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 627-630.]

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, particularly because I spent the most invigorating morning with the noble Baroness Symons yesterday in Rotherham and sent her back to the other place all fired up. Is not the hon. Gentleman making an immense meal out of this? I am privy to no papers, but I read in the *Financial Times* that the proposal was outlined in a paper by Mr. Robert Cooper of the Foreign Office, one of our cerebral gentlemen there. I read all about it before Pörtschach. So, far from it being sprung on the Austrians, it was widely reported in the press. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman takes out a subscription to the *Financial Times*. He will learn much to his advantage.

Mr. Key: First, may I say how surprised, but delighted, I am that the hon. Gentleman has visited Rotherham. I congratulate him. I do not need to take out a subscription to the *Financial Times* because I can read it in the Library of the House, along with *The Sun*.

Chancellor Klima of Austria has more definite ideas. He said at Pörtschach, that a "new dynamic" has developed on the issue in the European Union and that he had observed the emergence of a "commitment" as regards a common foreign and security policy. He said that the Prime Minister's intervention on the subject, which included the "variant" of the "possible integration" of WEU into the EU, reflects a "movement" by London that cannot but be welcomed. Several summit participants commented that the European countries should have a common position on the subject by the time of the NATO summit in Washington in April 1999. However, Mr. Klima made a point of stating that the Vienna European Council should not be expected to indicate the time of a possible merger of WEU into the EU. That is a relief, but it is imposing a pretty tight timetable on the Government for that debate.

In Vienna last week, the French Defence Minister, Alain Richard, was clear too, saying:

"No-one contests the importance of the transatlantic link for our security, but neither does anyone doubt that a Europe with a single currency cannot go long without a real defence and security dimension".

He considered that it would be "very useful" for discussions between WEU and NATO on the

"use of cores of CJTF headquarters in a European command chain".

All that evidence shows me that many people in Europe seem to be clear, but that this House is not, even if any member of the Government is.

What of our Italian allies? The Italian Defence Minister, Carlo Scognamiglio said that European military capabilities

"are not so limited or fragile as widely believed".

He said in Vienna that the Europeans can field more soldiers, ships or combat aircraft than the United States. However, he admitted that

"this numerical reality does not spell the operational truth".

According to Mr. Scognamiglio, one of the most striking aspects that emerged from those discussions was the fact that there was a

"gross lack of mutual knowledge among those forces".

He suggested the organisation of joint exercises and the development of exchanges between officers to remedy those shortcomings.

That is fine, but I thought that the Ministry of Defence was clear about the reorganisation of European defence industries—or has it been saying one thing in Brussels and another in the House? On 28 October, the Government published their response to the joint report of the Defence and Trade and Industry Committees on aspects of defence procurement and industrial policy. Recommendations q and l read:

"The Government does not support the creation of a 'Fortress Europe' . . . and it has consistently opposed any move towards a system of European preference which it believes is incompatible with the longer term competitiveness of European industry."

What of the views of the biggest country in Europe, Germany? Following the recent elections, an unlikely coalition emerged between the Social Democrats—always suspicious about defence—and the Green party—always opposed to defence, to large industries in general and to defence industries in particular.

In Baden-Baden, Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping said that he wanted to strengthen Europe's role in NATO. He said:

"I would like us to finally overcome our weakness in Europe and formulate a common foreign and security policy".

On Thursday, he said on Südwestrudfunk radio that there must finally be a strong European pillar in NATO, which was not at all the case at the moment—"at least," he added,

"it is not as strong as it should be".

He said that he wanted to tackle that great challenge, but that nothing would happen until the new defence structure commission—Germany's version of the strategic defence review—had reported.

Unlike the British Government, who said that they would complete their review in six months, the German Government have said that the commission will take two years. The French and the Italians expect something to happen by early next year, but Germany is saying, "Hang on a minute. We aren't going to do anything for at least two years and then we'll let the world know what we think."

Of the Greens' demands to cut the size of the Bundeswehr, Mr. Scharping said that it made no sense to deal with abstract figures now and that conclusions for the future of the Bundeswehr could be drawn only after careful assessment of the situation. The coalition expressly agreed to take any budget and business decisions on the Bundeswehr only when the results of the defence structure commission were available.

The realities are different. In the Gulf war, Britain and France joined the US-led military coalition whereas other EU members refused to commit troops. EU members were unable to agree a common approach to diplomatic efforts to end the conflict. In the former Yugoslavia, they took different views on the recognition of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The way forward in resolving the conflict in Bosnia—the when and how of using military force—was in disarray. Peace was established only when the US took the diplomatic and military lead.

In serious crises, the divergent position of EU members will undermine efforts to establish a common approach. The diversity of EU members and the distinctiveness of their national foreign policy traditions often make agreement difficult. The EU lacks the political institutions and instruments that are necessary for an effective common foreign and security policy. It has no collective foreign ministry to provide intelligence, analysis and political advice and it lacks mechanisms to ensure that member states implement common positions once they have been agreed. Mechanisms for collective action via the WEU are only now being developed, although, as I said in last week's Army debate, I welcome them.

The Government must deal with the muddle and confusion in their policy. I recognise that this country has new opportunities, but there is a fixed timetable in which to achieve NATO's new strategic vision. NATO has delivered peace and stability for Europe, whereas the role of the WEU has begun to emerge only since the Petersberg declaration.

The Conservative party does not oppose progress, which is vital; we oppose the Government's confusion. Strong defence is the Government's first duty to the country and their first duty to the House is to tell us of their new policy ambitions—they must not forget that they are accountable to the House. Ministers should not trot around Europe from hotel to hotel, spa to spa and conference to conference, speculating on the future of our defence. Infrequently, they issue communiqués, but mostly we have to rely on foreign press reports and selective press briefings in Whitehall.

In a few minutes, the House will be remembering that, 80 years ago today, the armistice that brought to an end the first world war was signed. Most of us lost relatives in those terrible battles. The loss of life was on a scale unimaginable today, when such carnage would be unacceptable. That is why, if we love peace, the people of these islands will always have to prepare for war.

There are always some who say that the sacrifices of the first and second world wars were futile. They were not futile. It is because our youngest, fittest, brightest and best risked their lives that our Parliament is today debating the future of the common defence of

[Mr. Key]

the peaceful, stable and expanding democracies that have grown from the ashes of the countries that twice this century tore themselves to pieces. In the abiding hope of peace and prosperity for Europe in the next century, we will remember them.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on securing what he rightly described as a timely debate on the European Union and defence policy. He strayed from that important subject by, among other things, disparaging Oxford. I do not know whether he has discussed that with the Leader of the Opposition or with some of his other colleagues; perhaps we are seeing a new fault line in the Conservative party.

I was astonished that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) mentioned the leaking of Government papers, especially after the results of the inquiry into the leaking of the White Paper on the strategic defence review. I should have thought that a period of silence on the subject would be appropriate.

As hon. Members know, the Amsterdam treaty will come into force when the final instrument of ratification is deposited. We expect that to be soon, although it will depend on the agenda of other national Parliaments. The treaty provides important new instruments to strengthen the common foreign and security policy. It also clarifies and sets limits on the defence aspects of CFSP and the role of the Western European Union in providing the European Union with access to an operational capability.

The Government have launched a wide-ranging debate in the European Union on the future of Europe. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister opened the debate on defence and security issues at the informal European Union summit in Austria at the end of October and, as has been said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence reinforced that by leading the discussion at an informal conference of EU Defence Ministers in Vienna last week. Moreover, I dealt with the subject in the House on 20 October.

Hon. Members mentioned the problems that arose during previous crises. It is because of those problems that our aim is to enable the European Union to have a more united and influential voice, which may be articulated with greater speed and coherence through the common foreign and security policy. That voice must be backed up, when the need arises, with effective and prompt military action. The European Union must be able both to decide and to act quickly and effectively to achieve common goals. We believe that that will require some fresh thinking on the future direction of European defence.

Mr. MacShane: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be most welcome if the British Army and, indeed, the European armies, sent their engineering corps and regiments—our Sappers—to help rebuild central America? I know that I speak for the Territorial Army engineers in Rotherham, who would be delighted to help to rebuild bridges and roads and to bring some peace and hope to that devastated region. Britain could lead an armada for peace involving our European partners' armies and professional military engineers. Much equipment—including JCBs and bulldozers—is currently mothballed, so let us send it to central America, to show that our Sappers and engineers from other European armies can provide concrete help.

Mr. Spellar: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the enormous efforts of our troops in that appalling emergency. Further discussions are taking place on the most cost-effective and operationally effective ways in which to help in the full-scale reconstruction of the countries in that area, but I am sure that his comments will be considered.

Mr. Blunt: The Minister said that the European Union must have the capacity to act. However, under the Amsterdam treaty, the EU will ask the WEU to act for it. Is he presaging a change in Government policy, whereby such capabilities will be given to the EU?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait, as the later part of my speech will make clear the direction in which we are moving.

The changes are a development of our on-going policy, and accusations about a lack of co-ordination are, frankly, ludicrous. Britain has always sought to build strong foundations for European security. Under the post-war Labour Government, we were a founder member of both the Atlantic Alliance and the Western European Union. Since then, Governments of both parties have contributed to the successful growth and adaptation of those organisations throughout their history, as they have evolved to respond to changing circumstances, just as they must today.

We have played a key role in developing the European security and defence identity within NATO, an initiative launched at NATO's Brussels summit in 1994 under the previous Administration and strengthened in 1996 at Berlin. The first meeting of NATO Defence Ministers at the level of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, 10 days after Berlin, attended by the then Defence Secretary, Michael Portillo, warmly welcomed the Berlin agreement and agreed to oversee the implementation of its defence and military aspects. I was slightly confused about whether the hon. Member for Reigate supported those decisions by the previous Administration.

We have also been a key player in developing the Western European Union's ability to enable Europeans to act together militarily: an idea that dates back to 1984, when the WEU was reactivated as the vehicle for developing a common European defence identity.

We are rightly proud of a defence capability that is respected and admired throughout the world, and will be all the more so following the implementation of the strategic defence review. We should also be proud of our readiness to intervene to help those in need and to stamp out violence and repression: to act as a force for good. It is right and proper that we bring our experience to the table and ensure that the debate takes a realistic and pragmatic course, reflecting our own interests, and that European rhetoric is turned into hard-nosed reality.

Contrary to the unfounded assertions of the hon. Member for Reigate, we are not talking about removing defence from the control of national Governments and

national Parliaments. Of course, as the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) said, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, member states must retain control of the use of their armed forces and the circumstances in which they are placed in danger.

We do not believe that it would be right for the European Commission or the European Parliament to have any direct role in those decisions; nor must there be any question of undermining NATO or attempting to duplicate it. NATO will rightly remain the foundation of our collective defence, as set out in article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty. That was explicitly recognised for the first time in a European Union context in the Amsterdam treaty.

Our aim is to strengthen Europe's position in the world. Europe's 370 million citizens expect and deserve nothing less. We want to ensure that Europe can speak with authority and act with decisiveness. For that to be a reality, European foreign policy needs to be coherent, responsive and credible.

There is no simple way of achieving that. Partly, it is a question of ensuring that we have sufficient common political will; perhaps even more importantly, it requires the establishment of an effective defence capability to underpin that will; and partly we need to get right the institutional arrangements that link the two.

Mr. Brazier: Does it not show what an exercise in fantasy building the European military dream is for the Minister to speak of underpinning defence capability when it is so clear that countries throughout Europe, with the honourable exception of France, are in the process of slashing their military budgets? Projects are being cancelled in Germany at this very moment.

Mr. Spellar: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should disparage, for example, the very effective joint amphibious capability that we have with the Dutch. That is an excellent example, and we want to develop that relationship. I am sure that he would agree that that is the right way to assert a proper European presence within NATO, which, as he would also surely agree, is the cornerstone of our defence policy.

The positive responses of our European partners to the speeches by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence bear testimony to the timeliness and importance of our approach.

We cannot conjure up shared political will by waving a wand. We need only look at recent experience to see how difficult it is to agree policies that respect and accommodate the diverse interests of all our European partners, whose international postures range from strict neutrality to active interventionism. Having reached agreement, it is equally, if not more, difficult to respond rapidly to changing circumstances.

To take our place in the world we will need to move beyond that, towards a foreign policy that is both forward looking and proactive and has the ability to respond to fast-moving situations. That will provide a response to the criticisms of past practice that have rightly been made in the Chamber.

Mr. Blunt: The Minister has still to address the Government's policy on the Western European Union. Nothing that he has said is inconsistent with a proposal to abolish the WEU. The Amsterdam treaty, which was signed by the Minister for the Armed Forces in his previous capacity, is not even in force yet, and the Ministry of Defence has yet to deny that a proposal to overturn the whole basis of the way in which our defence is treated is actively being considered.

Mr. Spellar: We do not intend to be frightened by the various ghosts that the hon. Gentleman is conjuring up. It will be easier to get through this speech if I am allowed to follow on logically rather than being constantly interrupted.

We will need to exploit the instruments that were created at Amsterdam. The appointment of a high representative for the common foreign and security policy, with real standing and authority, will be a step in the right direction, and I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for that. We will have significantly advanced our ability to decide and to react, but that will not be enough: we also need to enhance our ability to act.

If Europe is to have a stronger voice in the world, European armed forces will need to be capable of supporting our position. We need to put muscle behind Europe's foreign policy for those few hard cases when the normal instruments of foreign policy—trade, economic and political relations and diplomacy—are not enough.

Hon. Members will be aware of Kofi Annan's statement on his return from Iraq. He said:

"You can do a lot with diplomacy but, of course, you can do a lot more with diplomacy backed up with firmness and force."

That is frequently quoted, but it is a perfect encapsulation of what we should be striving to achieve for Europe, especially in those situations in which our North American allies are not directly engaged. We need to be confident that, when we call for action, we have the right means at our disposal to act. Having the right means will contribute, bottom up, to the process of building the confidence and the shared political will that European foreign policy needs.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Spellar: We need a defence capability that is fit for today's world. We must recognise that future crises may arise anywhere and at any time. We need armed forces that are deployable and sustainable, powerful and flexible, mobile, survivable and highly capable. Those were the fundamental tenets of the strategic defence review, reflecting the approach that we have taken to modernising our armed forces better to suit their tasks of today and tomorrow.

Mr. Blunt: Will the Minister still not give way?

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Spellar: Effective military capability and collective political will are clearly the key requirements. The institutional arrangements have been the focus of much speculation and coverage.

Mr. Blunt: Surely the Minister must give way now.

Mr. Spellar: If the hon. Gentleman wants me to get to the point that he wants me to cover, he had better stop shouting.

[Mr. Spellar]

The key is to be confident that, when we call for action, we have not only the right means at our disposal but the right mechanisms to act promptly. Mechanisms already exist to turn the common political will of the European Union into military action. The member states have agreed that the Western European Union should support the EU in framing the defence aspects of the common foreign and security policy and that the EU can avail itself of the WEU for operational purposes, relating to the Petersberg tasks, covering humanitarian and rescue operations.

At the Berlin summit in 1996, NATO declared its readiness to provide assets and capabilities to the WEU for European-led operations.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Spellar: The procedures are cumbersome and we want to consider with our partners and allies whether it might be possible to streamline them to match our aspirations. In other words, once we make a decision, can we be sure that it will lead quickly and effectively to action? That may have institutional implications, but that is not where we are starting from. Our options include breathing new life into the WEU, which is important, but that option has pros and cons.

As we prepare to observe a two-minute silence to remember those who fell or were injured and those who lost loved ones in two world wars and other conflicts during this century, it is right that we recognise the enormous contribution that Europe's security institutions, especially NATO, have made to keeping the peace in Europe over the past 50 years. They remain relevant because they have evolved to reflect changing circumstances. We owe it to succeeding generations to ensure that we continue to work to preserve and to strengthen them. Today, we remember an older generation who secured peace in Europe. Tomorrow, we will continue to work to ensure peace for the next generation.

11 am

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us stand for the two-minute silence.

11.2 am

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Eastern Region

11.2 am

Mrs. Christine Butler (Castle Point): I am pleased to bring the important subject of the economic development of the east of England region to the notice of the House. Recent legislation will provide for nine English regions, including the east of England, and I shall focus on the six counties that will form the east of England region.

I was surprised, and somewhat perturbed, by recent inquiries from the media and others that suggested that they did not know the boundaries of the region. They did not know how many counties it contained and they were not well advised about the new regional development agencies or the regional chambers that will be established and become effective from next year. They also did not know the overall remit of the regional agencies, stakeholders and chambers. Therefore, I propose to outline that remit and inform the House and the wider public about it.

The east of England region comprises Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, including the unitary authorities of Luton, Southend and Thurrock. The importance of regional development should be obvious to everyone, because the regions will be able to do what Whitehall alone cannot. I remember the days of Harold Wilson and the Invest in Britain Bureau, which did a marvellous job. Since then, we have had Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies, which proved very successful. It is time now for regional devolution to the English regions and for the promotion, especially, of the east of England region.

The board of the regional development agency is now being drawn up and the chairman is Vincent Watts. I congratulate him on his appointment and wish him every success in his endeavours. I hope that he is listening to the debate. The chambers are also being formed and they will be the accountable base in the region. I look forward to the time, perhaps in the next Parliament, when we have regional government with a directly elected chamber.

The new policies have some detractors, but I hope that today's debate will reassure them that the policies are right. The need for a strategic investment and overview, with counties and stakeholders working together for the greater benefit of the entire region, is something no one can deny. The new RDA has the support of the voluntary sector, the Confederation of British Industry, local government, the training and enterprise councils and a range of other stakeholders. They are happy with the new development and wish to see it go even further, as do I.

The regional boards will bring private sector leadership that will help to drive the regional economy forward. The Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 describes the functions of the regional development agencies. They are:

"to further the economic development and the regeneration of its area . . . to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness . . . to promote employment . . . to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment in its area . . . and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom where it is relevant to its area to do so."

That last point should be underlined.

The region of the east of England comes 42nd out of 77 regions in Europe for gross domestic product. Until 1995, it was sixth in the UK—those are the latest statistics

that I have found—but I have been told that the situation has improved since then and the region may now lie third. The region is diverse. To the north, it has food processing and huge agricultural interests. Research and development activity is above average, and includes a pharmaceuticals base. It has a defence industry, including firms such as GEC Marconi, which has been a significant influence. Research and development takes place at Ford's huge plant at Dunton near Basildon. A wonderful skills and technology transfer is about to happen, and I welcome the recent developments in that respect in some of our more notable university towns. More needs to be done.

The Cambridge area is one of the region's drivers for science and technology. I hesitate to step on the toes of another hon. Member. so I will not to go into too much detail, but I want to describe some of the things that are happening and that need to happen. We face real challenges in respect of our evident weaknesses.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Butler: Briefly, but I encourage my hon. Friend to make her speech later. If she—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. The hon. Lady must take her seat when the occupant of the Chair stands. Hon. Members who are speaking should give way or decline interventions immediately not have a mini-debate on the subject.

Mrs. Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mrs. Christine Butler.

Mrs. Butler: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Campbell: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I do not wish to interrupt the flow of her remarkable speech. The growth of high-technology industry in Cambridge and south Cambridgeshire can be an important driver for the region, but it is important to get the infrastructure needed to allow the diffusion of high-tech industry. I hope that we agree that some parts of our region badly need development but are prevented from getting it because high-tech industry is concentrated into a small, congested area around Cambridge.

Mrs. Butler: My hon. Friend is right. Our region is diverse and has disparities within it. Some areas are performing well, some not so well. In general, the better-performing areas are central and the less-well-performing areas are the peripheral and coastal areas and those nearer London. They have problems. In some cases, transportation links are weak. We need increased investment in public transport to supply the rural hinterland around Norwich and Cambridge, and towards the coast, as well as seeking regeneration in the south.

In south Essex, our old infrastructure needs to be tackled. It would help if the east Thames gateway were extended as far as Southend, matching the extension that is developing well in Kent on the other side of the river. We are not foolish enough to believe that that would bring enormous grant aid, but it would align us with the rest of the corridor. We would be able to bid into the regeneration and seek improvement in south Essex.

The east of England has a diverse economy with no single predominant industry but it has one of the largest concentrations of new and growing businesses. Within that there are significant geographical concentrations in successful industries such as food processing in the north of the region, pharmaceuticals in the south, and biotechnology in the Cambridge area. However, it must be recognised that the region has areas of economic inactivity and low productivity. Some urban, coastal and rural communities have suffered from adverse market changes and deprivation, with low earnings and household income depressing local spending.

The Government offices for the regions have been tasked by the Government to produce a strategy. I have the "East of England Competitiveness Strategy 1998–2008", and I was pleased to see it. Hard work has gone into it and I congratulate the Government office that produced it on its stalwart efforts in getting it in before time. It is a good programme. The background information notes that gross domestic product per capita in the east of England is 92 per cent. of the European average, placing it 42nd of the 77 European regions.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving way. Does she agree that the document to which she referred is not yet the strategy of the regional development agency, which is not due till next October? Can she venture a project that is to be undertaken by the RDA that would add value to existing activities in the eastern region?

Mrs. Butler: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but he is saying it to trip me up. I was hoping for a constructive debate. We are present at the imminent birth of something. I am trying to describe the work and research that has gone into what needs to be done and the methods for doing it. It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to shake his head and smile. I note that his party is not enamoured of the strategic approach that can be gained through regions. I think that he is wrong.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been increased inward investment in the region as a direct result of the establishment of the RDA?

Mrs. Butler: My hon. Friend is right, but effective implementation, with the boards and chambers up and running, has not yet happened. It is being readied, but already the interest and the work that has been going on have encouraged investment. Improvements have been made already. I do not have the information with me for the enlightenment of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), but I have read of areas where inward investment has occurred because of that approach.

The aim of the strategy is that, in 10 years, the east of England should be one of the 30 most prosperous regions in Europe. Considerable benchmarking has been going on. The objectives are outlined as follows:

"Improving the Performance of Existing Businesses

Attracting and Creating more Businesses

Developing a World Class Workforce

Developing a More Effective Communications Infrastructure

Helping Business to Meet Regulatory Requirements

Economic Development to be Environmentally and Socially Sustainable."

For the next steps for each objective, the competitiveness strategy identifies the key actions that the east of England needs to take. On

"Improving the Performance of Existing Businesses",

it identifies:

"Promoting Benchmarking

Encouraging Innovation

Preparing for EMU

Developing Expertise in Business Support

Improving Management Training."

It is not a moment too soon. There is a productivity deficit not only in the east of England, but in the entire United Kingdom. By saying that I do not mean to take a shot at the work force—an interpretation that Opposition Members have previously tried to promote, which is dishonourable of them—but to urge improvement of management skills and procedures, and an increase in investment.

To attract and create more businesses, we need to increase inward investment. We need to strengthen support for start-ups, identify sectors for support and arrange local clusters surrounding a dominant industry, whose core needs can be met through a mutual approach to the product of the main business. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) looks puzzled: I am willing to give way if he wants to ask a question.

We need to develop a world-class work force by defining skills needs. That problem requires attention. I have attended several regional forums in which businesses say that, although they have job vacancies, the work force lack the fully developed skills needed to meet the demands of the local labour market.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for inviting me to intervene. She has raised the importance of encouraging business start-ups. As a fellow Essex Member of Parliament, will she tell the House what she thinks has been the significance of the AMT—the regional centre for the advancement of manufacturing and technology—in Essex?

Mrs. Butler: I was a member of Essex county council when the decisions on that and the Konver programmes were being considered. In truth, to judge the benefit of the AMT is not an easy task.

Mr. Burns: Why not?

Mrs. Butler: I shall continue with my speech, because other hon. Members want to make a contribution.

We have skills deficits in certain areas and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to do what he can to help address those problems. I suggest that what is needed is closer co-operation between further and higher education, as people in certain parts of the region lack ready access to higher education. I congratulate some local institutions that are franchising with further education and thereby enabling students to undertake higher education courses locally. Anglia polytechnic university, which is an example of a good regional university that is vocationally oriented, offers a model which others might do well to emulate.

It would be wrong to talk about what business can do without addressing what others can do. Two planning conferences—Serplan, the south-east regional planning conference, and SCEALA, the Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities—meet and their remit is wider than the eastern region. I hope that, in future, there will be one planning conference that covers the eastern region as a whole, as that would be helpful.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the marvellous work he has done so far. It is his stated opinion that, within the current proposals and policies and the legislation that is soon to be enacted, there is a promise of evolution. I am pleased about that, but I should like that evolution to develop as fast as possible. Much will depend on the performance of the RDAs and the regional chambers.

I want the funding regime for the RDA to be more generous. I acknowledge the money coming from English Partnerships and the Rural Development Commission and the valuable work of the Government office for the eastern region, but I also want the training and enterprise council budget eventually to go to the RDA, and the TEC and other bodies to have to put in value-added bids. That would be a good way to ensure that the dynamism behind the economic regeneration and future development of the area rests with the RDA; thus, the RDA will be seen as important and powerful, which will attract the right players to it.

I should not like to finish without mentioning transport. If we are not careful, we will bid for too many roads, which would not fit in with the integrated transport White Paper. Instead, we need to reduce the need to travel. Our efforts might take the form of a regional planning guidance note 13, which would try to drive planning towards having transportation corridors, with areas of employment and housing more closely integrated, thereby obviating the need to travel long distances to work. That trend is stronger in our region than anywhere else. Such policy must be developed for the long term because planning takes time and the implementation of plans takes even longer, but we have to start some time and now is as good a time as any.

Given the eastern region's wonderful geographical position within the United Kingdom and Europe, concomitant with proposals for economic development and regeneration in the eastern region must be planning policies that promote sustainability. Those policies must guide the new boards in their promotion of the region for inward investment and relocation of businesses.

Business can help when there is no requirement for workers to be based at a specific site: for example, call centres do not need to be near an airport—they can be located anywhere. Improvements in communication technology will mean that many more businesses are free to relocate. What is needed is the right sort of support for businesses, so that those things can happen and happen more speedily.

I hope that my introduction and broad-brush description of our region—its best points and its inherent weaknesses—will generate further discussion. I shall

enjoy listening to other hon. Members making their contribution this morning. Now that we are about to establish a real identity for the east of England, I hope that stakeholders outside the Chamber will add their voice to the general debate, which I am sure will encourage partnership working in the years to come.

11.29 am

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): I congratulate the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on securing this important debate for the eastern region, which, as she said, comprises the six counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. They have a combined population of 5 million and the region is therefore bigger than many countries. I do not, however, advocate independence from the United Kingdom. I seek fairness from the Government and the European Union.

The eastern region is the fastest growing in Britain. Not for nothing is it known in government speak as GOER—the Government office for the eastern region. We are all goers in the eastern counties. Between 1981 and 1991, the region's population grew by 6.1 per cent., and an even faster increase of 6.4 per cent. is forecast by 2000, compared with 3.2 per cent. for the country.

With an area of 7,380 square miles or 19,117 square kilometres, the eastern region represents almost 8 per cent. of UK land area. The population is just under 10 per cent. of the UK total. The region, as has been pointed out, is diverse and stretches from the Wash to the Thames, skirting the suburban fringe of Greater London and embracing the finest agricultural land in Britain. Industrial and commercial centres are located throughout the six counties. New and historic towns and cities are surrounded in most instances by extensive rural areas, which give the eastern region its distinctive urban-rural mix.

The coastline is one of the longest in the country, with major seaports and other maritime interests to be found along it. London's developing third airport is at Stansted. The region has six universities—including the University of Essex, which is Britain's most international university—and one of Britain's largest garrison towns. It has a wide range of industrial and manufacturing industries, one of which, I am pleased to say, has been voted Britain's exporter of the year—Woods Air Movement in my constituency.

Although the region is generally prosperous, there are pockets of serious economic and social deprivation, particularly in areas affected by the decline of traditional industries such as agriculture, fishing and defence, as well as the decline of seaside resorts. Its population, gross domestic product and number of businesses represent around 10 per cent. of UK totals, which makes it easy to relate to national statistics.

Unemployment in September was 3.3 per cent. compared with a UK average of 4.6 per cent. That will be of little comfort to my constituents who were told yesterday that the long-established printing firm of Spottiswoode Ballantyne is to shut with the loss of 140 jobs, along with around 90 jobs being lost at the sister company of Cowells in Ipswich. Also, yesterday, 30 workers at Albany Laundry in Colchester heard that they were to be made redundant, news which follows confirmation of the loss of 60 jobs at the hospital laundry in the town.

While the regional unemployment average is below the national figure, the picture is not even. In Clacton, Harwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft, for example, unemployment is more than double the regional average.

The eastern region needs to draw on its strengths to overcome its weaknesses. I shall leave it to others to concentrate on the problems of agriculture, which remains a dominant feature of the region's prosperity.

The need to improve the transport infrastructure is particularly important. I hope that the Government will push forward with all speed the development of the Eurorail connection at Stratford in east London. The road link between Ipswich and Norwich needs to be upgraded. The Minister's assurance today on those matters would be appreciated.

It is vital that we spread new development more evenly. Some areas are experiencing pressures of growth while others witness decline and deprivation. That balance must take account of the need to retain the best of the region's distinctive qualities: our attractive natural and built environment. We have a diverse economy, and we must maintain that. We have an adaptable work force with good industrial relations.

The eastern region, however, is 42nd out of the 77 regions in the European Union Economic League. We have the potential to make it one of the most prosperous in Europe, as set out in the "East of England Competitiveness Strategy 1998–2008", the launch of which I attended in the summer.

Today's debate provides an opportunity for the 56 Members of Parliament for the eastern region to highlight all that is good in our part of the UK. We look to the Government to treat us fairly and ask for nothing less than an eastern promise.

11.35 am

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on securing this debate, which the Commons Library informs me is the first debate on economic development in the east of England for at least 20 years. That is, perhaps, an interesting comment on the previous Parliament.

I stress the importance of recognising the east of England as a region and ensuring that the region recognises itself. That is not an easy task because, when one leaves the traditional counties of East Anglia and reaches the south-western and western parts of the region, one finds that people do not have a strong regional identity. In Bedford and Kempston, for example, the connections to the west—to Milton Keynes and Northampton—are at least as strong as those to Cambridge in the east. None of those connections is as strong as those to the south—to London.

If we were to adopt a laissez-faire attitude, London would become the regional capital of everywhere that looks to it for one function or another. That region would be huge, disparate and over-dominated by London. It would be difficult for any activity to take place in most parts of the region because people would live there and travel to and from London. There would be suburban deserts with over-congested transport links into and out of the metropolitan centre. That would be the result of bad planning or, more likely, an abdication of planning, leading to economic under-performance and a denial of opportunity for hundreds of thousands of people whose quality of life would be impaired.

[Mr. Patrick Hall]

In some ways, that is exactly what has happened in past decades. We need, and there is a consensus for, economically dynamic communities across the country, not only in big cities but in towns and villages that have a lot to offer in their own right. We need communities that offer a balance of jobs and social, leisure and educational opportunities. We need communities that enjoy civic pride and care about their area. One of the necessary ingredients for achieving that are strong regions, which offer valuable qualities different from those in London or any other big city.

Today, we have the opportunity to drive forward that process because we have a Government who understand the importance of regional development and who will soon speed up that process through the introduction of regional development agencies.

A strong eastern region will not weaken the special role of London or devalue contacts with any other town or region. It will strengthen those contacts and the country as a whole. We have to make the eastern region work. Much needs to be said about that, but there is not much time for me to elaborate, and I hope that other hon. Members will contribute.

I shall touch on two strategic issues, transport and relative deprivation. The existing transport network illustrates my point. Bedfordshire, for example, is one of the fastest-growing areas of the country in residential development and population growth, yet that has not been matched over the years by investment in the economy, in jobs and in the transport infrastructure. Unbalanced planning has resulted in some of the most heavily congested roads in the east of England, particularly the A1 and M1, which are, of course, north-south links.

I am convinced that there are great opportunities along an east-west axis. The eastern region will not prosper unless east-west links are considerably improved. One of the best ways of boosting the eastern region, including my constituency, Bedford, and Kempston, would be to deliver an east-west rail link.

A consortium of local authorities and Railtrack has been working on that project for some years. It is an imaginative proposal for a new rail route running from Ipswich to Cambridge, and then through Bedford, Milton Keynes, Oxford and Swindon, connecting finally to Bristol, with all the important junctions north to south with which that line would connect. It is a fantastic idea.

I understand that a revised business case is being prepared and will be submitted to the Government later this autumn. I hope that it will be sympathetically received, and that Ministers are in no doubt about my support for the concept and for the preferred route through Bedford. In the context of an integrated transport policy and the need to promote environmental sustainability, I hope that an east-west rail link will become attractive for freight as well as for passenger movements.

The second topic that I shall mention briefly, deprivation, is essentially a matter of perception and recognition. The absence of a clear voice for the eastern counties over many years may have assisted in the development of a view in Whitehall and Government circles that there are few problems in the east of England. The impression has been one of general affluence. There are indeed comfortable villages, towns and suburbs, but there are also pockets of deprivation in both town and country, which are not always recognised by Government statistics.

The index of local deprivation, for example, focuses on whole council areas. Bedford borough ranks 218 out of 354 local authority areas in England in the 1998 index of local deprivation, yet three wards in Bedford rank in the top 10 per cent. of the most deprived wards in England. If one adds deprivation in other wards in Bedford and Kempston, about 30,000 people out of 92,000 in the constituency live in such areas—quite a large pocket. That is not the picture usually associated with Bedford and Kempston or with the eastern region.

I do not wish to detract from efforts to tackle deprivation, social exclusion, unemployment and under-performance in any other part of the country. The Government exist for the many, not just for the few. Therefore, every community deserves recognition, and the needs of every community must be measured more accurately. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to recognise that there are pressing needs in Bedford and Kempston and in the east of England. I am sure that, in the months and years ahead, he will hear more, not less, from me and my hon. Friends about the needs of the east of England.

11.44 am

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I, too, am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) secured the debate, and that she spent so much time outlining the region in general, as that allows me to concentrate on my part of it.

For someone born in East Anglia and who represents an East Anglian constituency, it has not been easy to come to terms with the boundaries of the eastern region. Many people in my constituency find it hard to comprehend what Lowestoft has in common with Watford, so it is not surprising that the eastern region has yet to develop its identity fully. Like other Members of Parliament and like business and community leaders in my constituency, I believe that we must make the best of what we have—hence, my support for the debate, to help to establish the identity of the eastern region in the House and further afield.

I strongly support a regional dimension to politics and government. That is important for the devolution of over-centralised power in this country, and in order to answer the West Lothian question and to position ourselves effectively in Europe, something that our region has not done in the past but is now beginning to do. There is strong support from business in my constituency for the new regional development agency, and we have high hopes of its tackling the problems in our part of the region.

As has been said, the outstanding features of the eastern region's economy are its diversity and disparities. It is generally seen as a prosperous region, but there are unemployment black spots. Lowestoft in my constituency, and the neighbouring town of Great Yarmouth, have suffered and continue to suffer, perhaps more than any other towns. We have long had the highest unemployment figures in the region. They move up and down, but they are always at least twice the regional average and three times the rate in the areas with the best figures. Unemployment is accompanied by low pay, deprivation, poor health and higher crime.

People in my constituency ask, "Why us? Why must we suffer?" They are loyal and hard working, there are good industrial relations and low labour costs, plenty of cheap industrial land is available, and the area is a nice place to live. Lowestoft officially has the best beach in England and we have the Broads national park—a pleasant environment.

However, for the past 15 years, people in my area have suffered unacceptable employment levels and a depressed economy. It is important to analyse the reasons for that decline. We have lost our traditional industries and therefore thousands of jobs. In Lowestoft, we have lost two shipyards and two food canning factories. Many hon. Members will remember the old Co-op brand name Waveney, which gave its name to my constituency. It exists no longer. The Eastern Coach Works was once the largest employer, but that has gone too, as has a shoe factory. Hon. Members will be familiar with the decline in fishing. Once, one could walk right across Lowestoft harbour on the boats lined up next to one another. Now we have just 10 trawlers and 30 smaller inshore vessels. Our inner harbour area contains acres of dereliction, with factories empty or razed to the ground.

We have benefited to some extent from the cushion provided by the offshore oil and gas industry, but jobs there are being reduced. We have had the cost reduction initiative for the new era—CRINE—and unfortunately 140 jobs were lost at Shell's Lowestoft base two weeks ago.

Our part of the region has not succeeded in attracting new industries on a significant scale. Why? I am pleased that other hon. Members have drawn attention to the poor transport links. East Anglia is usually not seen as a peninsula because of its rounded shape, but if one drew a map showing travelling time rather than travelling distance, the peninsula would be greatly extended, possibly right across the North sea.

People in my area were disappointed by the roads review. We feel that we are condemned to continue with roads no better than winding country lanes, clogged up with tractors and with trucks passing through villages—which neither the truck drivers want to do, nor the villagers want to suffer. Our regional newspaper, the *Eastern Daily Press*, refers to life in the "slow lane". Our branch line railways are no better: it can take longer to travel by rail than by road. That affects business competitiveness in our area. I hope that the forthcoming competitiveness White Paper will recognise the degree to which transport costs and travelling time affect competition.

Transport accounts for a significant proportion of business costs. It is an instrument and an engine of economic development—not just an environmental inconvenience. Ironically, Lowestoft exists because it is a port—in fact, it is the country's most easterly port and has enormous potential as it points straight at Europe. There is container business at the port, which also handles grain imports and exports. Although a port integrates sea and land transport, it cannot operate successfully unless the land transport is adequate. We look forward to improvements in our road and rail transport. East-west links are important, but with only one such link, along the A14 corridor, the northern and eastern parts of the region would be further marginalised.

In order to attract new business, we must offer companies some incentive to relocate to our part of the region. Lowestoft does not have assisted area status and, without it, it is difficult for the council to summon the resources to provide a reason for companies to relocate there. As a former council leader, I dealt with companies that were seriously interested in relocating to the area. However, because we could offer them no real incentive to do so, they often went somewhere else.

It is a travesty of justice that, under the previous Government, Lowestoft did not receive assisted area status—although it was granted to Great Yarmouth. The previous Government realised their mistake and cobbled together some European structural funds, to the extent that Lowestoft was redefined as a rural area and received objective 5b funding. In terms of regional strategy, anyone can see that Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth must be considered together. The answer is to give them both assisted area status and European structural funds, so that the areas that have suffered for so long can be regenerated properly. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) would have said the same thing today had he not been attending to other duties in his constituency.

We need a sub-regional strategy for the north and the east of our region, which suffer the most economic deprivation. There is a deeply held feeling that the previous Government severely neglected our area. When one lives on the coast—out on a limb—one is always anxious lest one be forgotten. This Government must not make the same mistake as the previous Government. The regional development agency must recognise our area as a priority and support us with financial measures. If the Government ensure that outcome, they will retain the confidence of people in my local area.

11.50 am

Miss Melanie Johnson (Welwyn Hatfield): I draw hon. Members' attention to my registered interest with Roche, a pharmaceutical company in my constituency. It gives me great pleasure to contribute to this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on her success in securing it. Regional development agencies herald the advent of a new era in this country and propose a new identity for the eastern region. They are extremely welcome.

I hope that hon. Members from all political parties will fight with equal vigour and enthusiasm on behalf of the eastern region and its new identity. The hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) nods his head. I congratulate him on his 100 per cent. support for the region. I also congratulate my hon. Friends on their enthusiastic support for the debate. However, I am disappointed to see only two Conservative Members in the Chamber—although almost twice as many Conservative Members as Labour Members represent the region. I am sorry that the Opposition have not made a positive contribution to the debate, and I hope that hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber will make such a contribution in future.

The eastern region comprises examples of the United Kingdom's strengths and many of its weaknesses. I believe that problems, and many answers, can be found in the region.

Mr. Burns *rose—*

Miss Johnson: I will not give way as there is not sufficient time.

[Miss Johnson]

Hertfordshire, where my constituency is located, is an area of skills and relative affluence. It is important to stress the word "relative", because I shall touch on some points raised by other hon. Members this morning—particularly the two previous contributions. Unemployment in Hertfordshire is at its lowest since 1991, and owner-occupation in Hertfordshire is well above the national and regional averages. One factor contributing to that result is the strength of the pharmaceutical base in the region.

More than 2,000 companies undertake pharmaceutical research and development, and a slightly greater number are involved in manufacturing and production. An estimated £900 million was spent on research and development in 1997, and 1996 figures for the region place the value of industry exports at more than £1.6 billion. Interestingly, the region's pharmaceutical industry contributes to the economy by generating an extra gross domestic product of £2 billion a year.

The pharmaceutical industry and other industries are attracted to the area—there are four very active pharmaceutical companies in my constituency—by our highly skilled work force. Some 80 per cent. of the population in Hertfordshire are classified in social groups 1, 2 or 3. Hon. Members can see that industry is drawing on a highly skilled base, which I know that the Government want to see replicated elsewhere in the region and the country. We must increase the skills base and thus boost the economic returns of industry.

However, those statistics and other indices often conceal inequalities. My hon. Friends the Members for Bedford (Mr. Hall) and for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) spoke eloquently about the way in which those indices disguise the poverty in their constituencies. The situation in my constituency is no different. One in 10 of Hertfordshire's electoral wards has been assessed, on the basis of wide-ranging factors, as being more deprived than the United Kingdom national average. There are 19 deprived wards in Hertfordshire, and areas of concern include unemployment and poor housing conditions. We must take those factors into account when compiling a picture of the region's needs and we must combat those pockets of deprivation while building on the region's economic strengths.

We must recognise, too, the region's diversity—although, sad to say, the region has lost much of that. The once large British Aerospace presence in my constituency is now a vacant site. That traditional industry employed thousands of people in my constituency but it was decimated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and its 896-acre site is now scheduled for development. That site could be used for housing, to create employment or for university use. We must encourage those sorts of interests in the region on a large scale.

The Minister will not be surprised if I turn to another theme common to those sketched by earlier contributors to the debate. Development of the site—I hope that it will commence within a year or so—is dependent upon improved east-west communications. The site cannot be developed without substantial support for local public transport and better east-west communications. The county council in Hertfordshire, and my colleagues there and in neighbouring counties, are keen to see the central Herts passenger transport scheme receive active support from the Government. That scheme is vital if we are to ensure that major sites such as this are developed and the local and national economies strengthened as a result. We need the link through Watford, St. Albans and through Welwyn Hatfield on towards the east to ensure that massive developments on hundreds of acres, involving housing and nearly 50 hectares for employment, can get under way.

We need to be sure that we have a new deal that will take account of the ambiguities and diversity of the eastern region. My hon. Friend the Minister has heard the good news and the bad this morning. He has heard about the areas where we are strong and the things that we need to tackle. We welcome the Government's approach. Their collaborative approach recognises that all the counties in the region and Hertfordshire can be a model for other areas to emulate, given the way they work together, and the way in which these issues can be dealt with. However, it needs to be recognised that affluence is still to be found alongside pockets of poverty.

I hope that transport will be recognised as one of the key factors. We have the tools to do much of the job ourselves, but we need a transport infrastructure and an integrated transport system that will ensure that progress is made.

It is good to know that Opposition Members who have not contributed to the debate have remained silent to allow Labour Members to speak for longer. I thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) particularly and his Opposition Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), for their generosity in that regard. However, I hope that the Opposition will be better represented in fighting the case for an exciting region that has a whole lot going for it. My colleagues and I think that it has a bright and promising future, with the Government's full support.

12.1 pm

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): The contributions of my hon. Friends have emphasised the diversity of need within the region. In looking to economic development, we need to recognise that a priority is to protect what we have as well as considering the new that we need to develop.

It would be remiss in a debate on the region, which includes some of the best agricultural land in the country, not to make some reference to the needs of farming. The House has spent some time on the issue in recent weeks and I do not need to rehearse the many difficulties that the farming community faces. In the part of Norfolk that I represent, which was at the heart of the agriculture revolution, the main farming interests remain arable. Therefore, we have not suffered to the same extent as the livestock and dairy industries. However, there is no area of farming in recent times that has completely escaped difficulty.

I have been reminded regularly by the farming community—most recently at a meeting with Tom Pexton, the deputy president of the National Farmers Union, Nick Velsboer, the local chairman, and others—of the wide range of problems that it faces. I am confident, following the debate on farming last week, that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is aware of the difficulties and is arguing the case

in the Cabinet for a set of measures to tackle the immediate issues. Yes, we need urgent action; but I tell the Government that that action needs to be part of a coherent package. It is important that we use extra money to modernise and adapt farming to the needs of the next millennium rather than to postpone problems. We need to address Agenda 2000 and tackle the greater world trade problems that I believe will face farming. I was extremely pleased, at the meeting with the NFU, to hear that local farmers, while in anguish about their problems, recognise that the Government's role is to help them address the future of agriculture.

Agriculture is three and a half times more important in my constituency than the national average. The devastation of the work available in agriculture since the second world war means that it now represents only about 5 per cent. of the economy in my constituency. Those who would see Norfolk as a place for the landed gentry and for tourism may not recognise that 95 per cent. of those who live in the county are dependent on work in industry, commerce and the service industries. That is much the same as elsewhere. When taking averages over large swathes of countryside it is easy not to appreciate that some of the wards in my constituency face needs and problems as great as those anywhere in the land. I hope that the Government, through the regional mechanism, will ensure that pockets of deprivation which seem small when averaged out but which locally are extremely important to those who have to face them, are tackled.

Our needs for industry have in recent times shared much in common with the needs of the rest of the country. I regret to say that, only this morning, the financial press is reporting that the important local company Porvair, which is at the forefront of the manufacture of microporous materials and which exports 80 per cent. of what it produces out of King's Lynn, is facing a 14 per cent. reduction in the work force because of the problems that it has experienced in world markets—owing to the high value of the pound and high interest rates. However, the picture is not all gloom and John Morgan, the chairman of Porvair, believes that the company can adjust, improve productivity, face new challenges and move forward. The same applies to most of the industry in my constituency.

The specific problems that we face in the region have already been mentioned. I challenge any Minister or shadow Minister to take the A47—a recognised trans-European road from Peterborough, through Thorney to Wisbech on the way to King's Lynn—and to feel that it does not need improvement. I accept that, nationally, the balance may have been badly struck between the need to meet traffic demand and the need to have measures to reduce traffic. However, no one can come to northern East Anglia without recognising the need not only for more than one east-west link along the A14 but for dramatic improvements and a dramatic change to Governments' attitudes of the past 20 years.

Last week, during the debate on agriculture, the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) referred to the Government's being inactive while Rome burned. The question that the Opposition need to address in terms of agriculture and the countryside is: who lit the fires that are burning? Our inheritance of problems in the region reflects decades of neglect of infrastructure. It is extremely difficult to entice investment to one's region to provide jobs for the future and to protect the jobs that are already there unless the Government recognise the needs of those who have never been served by decent roads.

The need for improved roads must be firmly grasped, while the Government must recognise the need in the urban environment to encourage less use of the motor car. I hope that the Government will recognise also—I was among the first to welcome the investment in rural transport provision in the Budget—that we shall never be in a position in rural areas to reduce people's need for the car to get to work and get about generally. That is why we have a high percentage of car ownership in my constituency; it is not because people are wealthy, but because there is no alternative. When we count the number of buses by the week, the exhortation to get on the bus by driving up petrol prices, with no counterbalancing action from the Government, is just not fair to my constituents.

I am sure that the regional development agency and regional government will be important ways forward because, by co-operating within our regions, we can achieve more than by bickering about what goes where. I hope that we will come to sensible compromises on where offices will be located and on priorities to ensure that we do not neglect the minority simply because of the constant need to address the needs of the majority in the region.

12.10 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on securing this debate, which is extremely important for all of us who have constituencies in the eastern region. How refreshing it is to have had an intelligent debate divorced of the normal party political bickering that, all too often, blights discussions in this Chamber.

I begin by concentrating my remarks primarily on my county of Essex, which, in many ways, is the gateway not only to East Anglia, but to the eastern region. In the southern part of the eastern region, we are fortunate to have a work force that, as one hon. Member has mentioned, is good, well skilled in many sectors and has excellent industrial relations; so it is an area that is attractive for employment and employees, even if we do not enjoy the status in relation to assistance and regional aid that other parts of the country have.

We have a good communications network. That is not exclusive to the whole region, as we have heard from a number of hon. Members.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the great constraints on development in the eastern region is the mess that his Government left behind by eroding public transport, which makes it impossible to get from one side of the region to the other?

Mr. Burns: When I allowed that intervention, I feared that we were going to get something that was slightly out of sync with the rest of the debate—and my fears were fully justified. I do not share that poisoned and poisonous view.

In the southern part of the region, we are fortunate in that we have a good transport communications network: the M25, the M11, the A12 and the improvements that, I hope, the Minister's Department will approve shortly to

[Mr. Burns]

the A130. We have an improving rail network. About 7,000 of my constituents commute every day to London to work. Improvements in signalling, points and rolling stock over the past decade have greatly enhanced rail transport from mid-Essex.

That does not mean to say, as many hon. Members have pointed out, that no further improvements have to be made. Improvements must be made on the A12 from the M25 to the ports of Harwich and Felixstowe. It is an important feeder road to those ports and beyond. As the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) said, the roads in Norfolk, although improving in certain areas, leave much scope for improvement.

As a number of hon. Members have said, we need improvements in the infrastructure of the railways. There has been talk of an east-west route from Ipswich through Welwyn Hatfield, Bedford, for which a bid was placed, Milton Keynes and towards Bristol. Given our closer economic and business development ties with Europe and the enhancement of the ports on the eastern seaboard, we need—this is overdue—improvements in that transportation to enhance the general economic well-being and attractiveness of the region, so that we can attract more businesses to it.

We have excellent academic facilities in the region. My own university, the Anglia Polytechnic university, is first rate. The university of Essex, the university of East Anglia in Norwich and, of course, the university of Cambridge in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) are vital in developing links.

Miss Melanie Johnson: The university of Hertfordshire.

Mr. Burns: We have another bid—the university of Hertfordshire. Those universities are important centres of excellence for working and developing links—in both training and product research and development—with local industries. More work must be done to build on the successes.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, because I have only five minutes. I do not want to eat into the Minister's time.

There is a problem in my county, not exclusively in my constituency, because it also affects the constituency of the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) and, I suspect, the Colchester area as well. Essex towns such as Chelmsford, Colchester and Basildon have a manufacturing base that one does not naturally associate with the leafy green suburbs of the home counties; the size of that manufacturing base has perhaps been unusual.

We are proud of that tradition, but many of those manufacturing companies are defence-related industries. In the past eight years in particular, with the ending of the cold war, the worldwide recession of the early 1990s and a greatly increased competitive world market, pressures have been exerted on companies to compete in those markets and to win contracts. We have paid a high price for the peace dividend, with significant redundancies being made in those defence-related industries.

Those companies have had the foresight to diversify, to protect and, in many ways, to expand their core base, but we have had to pay a price. We have been fortunate. I pay tribute here to Essex county council, under the control of all three main political parties over the past eight years, to the previous Government through the Department of Trade and Industry, and to this Government for the way in which they worked with the European Union to designate Essex an area that qualified for Konver funding, in relation to both Konver 1 and 2. That led to developments such as the advanced manufacturing centre in Chelmsford.

The centre has done critical and crucial work to help defence-related industry employees who have been made redundant to reskill and to retrain, and to give them the opportunity to use their skills and expertise to help to build small businesses. That is an important way forward, which puts back some of the goodness that has been taken away with the redundancies in the local economy; it starts off the small businesses of today that, I hope, will be the medium businesses of tomorrow and the larger employers of the future.

That is the way in which I would like further development to enhance the local manufacturing base. We do not want a constant erosion of that base to the point where a local community's employment base has been shifted significantly from a mix of services and manufacturing to services alone.

Not only in Essex, but throughout the region, we have to ensure that we promote ourselves as an area that is vibrant—that has much to offer both in its living environment and cultural events—so that people want to relocate there. More often than not, for financial reasons, companies will locate in areas where there are substantial Government grants through regional aid.

The east of England is a success story; it has a vibrant community. We must build on the work of many local authorities and other organisations and sell the region to ensure that we get our fair share of inward investment. We do not want to lose any more industries. Over the past 20 years, many have moved to other parts of the country because of financial benefits and local tax breaks.

I do not share the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Castle Point for regional development agencies, although we will have to await the establishment of our RDA next year to see whether it produces any concrete achievements. I disagree with her views on regional government—it would be another layer of pure bureaucracy, which would stifle rather than enhance the enterprise and initiative of business and commerce. I suspect that she and I will never agree on that matter.

I again thank the hon. Lady for giving us the opportunity to debate this important subject. I shall now sit down so that the Minister has a reasonable time to respond to the debate.

12.20 pm

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on securing the debate. I am delighted that she has chosen this subject. The contributions from the Labour Benches have been very thoughtful and have done credit to the region. I do not want to introduce a sour note to the debate, but Labour has 22 Members representing the

region and the Opposition 33 Members, yet not one Conservative Member has participated in the debate—other than the Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). They do not take the *future of* their region as seriously as do Labour Members—and, indeed, the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell), 100 per cent. of the Liberal Democrat representation in the region. Before the general election, Labour had four seats in the region; it now has 22. No doubt we will have even more after the next general election.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point rightly pointed out, the east of England is seen as a relatively prosperous region making a significant contribution to the United Kingdom economy. However, there is great concern that the region is not performing to its full potential—a point made by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford. If we take gross domestic product per head as a measure of performance, the region lies only 42nd out of 77 European regions. That is a legacy that the previous Government left us and we are determined to put it right.

In fact, if the London effect is stripped out, the region is below average in prosperity relative to the UK. On a workplace basis, GDP figures put the region after London, the south-east, Scotland, the south-west and the east midlands and only just ahead of the north-west. On a residence basis, which allows for the income brought into the region by commuters to London, the region is above the UK average with an index score of 109, behind only London and the south-east. However, on both measures, the relative score of the region has been on a downward trend over the past five years.

The region is highly varied. It incorporates the northern fringe of Greater London, medium industrial and commercial centres, and ports and seaside resorts, which have been described in the debate. It has no major conurbations, but a variety of new and historic towns and cities and extensive rural areas. It has areas of prosperity and growth, but also areas of real deprivation. It combines traditional manufacturing and agricultural industries with leading-edge technology and knowledge-based industry. Expenditure on research and development is 3.5 per cent. of GDP—the highest of any UK region.

However, the region is vulnerable and, as has been described in the debate, unfortunately there have been some job losses recently. That said, over the past 18 months there have been major new investments and real growth in the region, especially in retail, computing and financial services. Overall, employment is still increasing and the unemployment rate continues to decrease, remaining below the national average in every county in the region.

As has been said many times, the east of England is a relatively new region. It brings together East Anglia with the home counties of Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire. The region is, of course, still building its identity. I am greatly encouraged by the activity of partnership groups in the region, which have worked together in recent months to ensure that the East of England regional development agency—to be known as the EEDA—gets off to the best possible start. Local groups are working together to develop and implement regional strategies in key areas such as competitiveness and skills. All that activity has made a real contribution to partnership working in the region across a very wide range of interests, and through that to strengthening the region's identity.

I know from my visits to the region that there is a real enthusiasm in the east of England for the principle of a development agency and for a stake in its activity. That has been shown by the fact that we have received more than 400 high-calibre applications for the 12 seats on the board and almost 100 applications for the post of chief executive. The agency will be able to build on that commitment and activity to develop a fully integrated approach to regional development, both at a strategic level and at the coal face—although for this region it is the high-tech face—where local delivery organisations play such a key role.

A key task of the agency will be to produce a regional strategy to meet its responsibilities, including economic development and regeneration, employment and development skills, and sustainable development. That is in contrast to what was said by the Opposition spokesman, who adequately laid the problems of the region before the House, but not the way to resolve them. We are doing that—

Mr. Lansley: How will the development agency's strategy document interact with the agreement on PPG6 covering Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, as that is to be concluded before the RDA sets out its strategy?

Mr. Caborn: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, when I get to the relevant part of my speech I will deal with the plan, which is important.

The EEDA will need to take an integrated approach to producing its strategies and have regard to the needs of the east of England—urban and rural, sub-regional and local. We strongly believe that an integrated and inclusive approach is the best way to improve regional economic performance and to break down what I believe are artificial barriers between the rural and urban areas.

Our aim in the draft guidance on regional strategies has been to provide a steer to RDAs in producing their strategies, without being over-prescriptive and unnecessarily tying their hands. The strategies should not simply restate national policies, but will need to be relevant to the region and address its specific problems and the underlying structural weaknesses in terms of wealth creation.

Land use and transport issues are especially important in the east of England, where a combination of rapid population growth and economic development on the one hand, and rural decline and defence closures on the other, have created conflicting demands and pressures on the infrastructure. Again, that was adequately described in the debate.

I am very pleased that the first of the new public examinations of regional planning guidance will be in the east of England, when the Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities hearing takes place in February. That will be followed in May by the south-east regional planning committee hearing. Those hearings will provide an opportunity for everyone—including hon. Members—to have their say before final decisions are taken. PPG6 will be taken into consideration in the plan as it develops for the eastern region. We are trying to bring together the economic strategic overview for the

[Mr. Caborn]

eastern region with spacial planning and transport planning. We will then have a strategic overview of what is necessary in the eastern region.

The regional planning conferences are also beginning the vital new task of preparing integrated transport strategies, which will link on the one hand with the four-month modal studies that we have announced in the east of England, and on the other with the new integrated local transport plans. After that round is over, we shall begin the process of realigning the regional planning structure to match the new regions. Local authorities in the eastern region are already co-operating across the boundaries of SCEALA and SERPLAN, and RDAs will become another partner working in close co-operation with local government on planning and transport issues as it develops economic strategy. Such partnerships are where the impact on transport in the east-west corridor can be argued out, and they will inform Government policy. It is a bottom-up approach, working in partnership.

I have not been able in this debate to go into too much detail about RDAs. Nevertheless, when they begin functioning next April, they will make a significant difference in regions' ability to plan for the future. The eastern RDA will not only manage change but will develop the eastern region's assets, to ensure that it achieves the status that it wants as one of the best and most productive regions in the European Union. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point for initiating the debate, which has been very useful.

Residential Care Homes

12.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am most grateful for this timely opportunity to raise an issue of considerable importance to my constituents. That importance was emphasised only a fortnight ago, when I received a letter from the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdon local medical committee, which wished to raise with me precisely the same issues that I shall raise in this debate. I should like first to take this opportunity—my first opportunity—to welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box. He has onerous and important responsibilities—especially so given the forthcoming social services White Paper. I wish him well in meeting those responsibilities.

I shall do three things in this debate: first, highlight the impact of underprovision of residential care homes in South Cambridgeshire; secondly, demonstrate that, despite the benefit of measures being pursued by the health authority and Cambridgeshire county council social services, an increase in core funding for social services is necessary to prevent deterioration in the position; and, thirdly, draw specific attention to the circumstances arising from the proposed closure of the Red Cross-owned Meadowcroft residential care home in my constituency.

Let me first explain the nature of the problem. In August, and at intermediate times during the summer, Addenbrooke's hospital in my constituency and other local hospitals have been closed to non-emergency admissions. Such summer closures have been unprecedented in recent times. The nature of the problem underlying the closures is demonstrated by the fact that 160 patients—160 beds is almost equivalent to five hospital wards—in the local national health service system have been assessed as no longer requiring hospital care but remain in hospital beds.

About 83 of those hospital patients are awaiting placement in nursing or residential care homes. Additionally, Cambridgeshire county council has told me that 117 people are receiving care packages in the community who should be placed in residential or nursing home places. The council is unable to place those people. I know from personal conversations with some of those involved that some of those waiting in hospital are waiting not only for residential care places but for home adaptations that would allow them to return home.

Why has the problem continued? Additional money has been provided to deal with winter pressures, and I am sure that the Minister will give us further details on proposals for dealing with the coming winter. In the past three years, my health authority has provided Cambridgeshire social services department with £2.3 million to deal with explicit winter pressures. For the winter ahead, the health authority has provided £1.2 million to the social services department, and, because of announcements and allocations made in recent days, even more may be allocated.

The character of the funding provided in winter pressures money does not meet all the problems and, in some respects, may even exacerbate them. Places were purchased after winter pressures money was provided by the health authority to social services last winter, for example, creating a recurrent revenue implication that has to be borne by Cambridgeshire county council social services. This year, the cost is estimated at £400,000,

which will have to come out of the money available to social services, thereby reducing its ability to do other things.

At the same time as winter pressures money was being provided through the health authority, Cambridgeshire county council's social services standard spending assessment was cut by £1 million, not in real terms but in cash. The Government are therefore effectively giving with one hand while taking away with the other.

Meanwhile, pressures are increasing. The number of placements to homes is rising and the population of those over 85 is increasing in Cambridgeshire faster than in neighbouring counties. Although it is a happy fact that residents in homes are living longer, that is creating additional funding pressures. Additionally, more residents are exhausting their savings to below the £16,000 limit, to the point at which they effectively become a first charge on social services departments. That has happened in 32 cases so far this year.

Cambridgeshire social services is doing what it can. It is supporting the elderly at home; trying to prevent admissions; being flexible in its review of care packages; and attempting to turn some of the available respite care beds into intermediate and convalescent beds, thereby allowing hospital discharge. The county council is consulting on a proposal to privatise remaining local authority provision of residential home places, as that would enable it to purchase about four residential home places for each three places that it currently provides in its own homes.

There is, however, an underlying problem of underprovision to the social services department. Provision to neighbouring counties may demonstrate the point. In 1996–97—the last year for which I have comparable figures for counties in the eastern region—in total on residential care, home support and nursing care, Cambridgeshire was spending £467 for each 75-year-old or older resident in the population. The figure was £840 for Hertfordshire, £908 for Norfolk, £925 for Suffolk and £1,075 for Bedfordshire.

The Minister and those of us who know Cambridgeshire well will know that Cambridgeshire social services has a particular requirement to focus its activities on children's services and to support its child protection activity. The county council is taking that responsibility extremely seriously, and that is partly influencing its distribution of funds within social services. However, that is only part of the story.

The principal determinant of the county council's ability to spend on services to the elderly remains provision of finance as dictated by the standard spending assessment. The Minister will realise that Cambridgeshire county council is capped at an extraordinarily low spend level, and that it therefore lacks the discretion to go further in increasing its overall resources.

I ask the Minister to do three things. The first is to enhance Cambridgeshire's standard spending assessment in the forthcoming round, to the point at which the county council's social services department is able to meet the responsibilities that it incurs. The second—on the process of winter pressures money being provided to assist in ending delay in discharging patients from acute hospital beds—is to end ad hoc funding and to make funding reflect the continuing revenue costs of such placements. The third is to end the process whereby the Government are effectively paying for social services activity with health money—whereby health care funds are being diverted into social care. Such a diversion of funds has adverse effects on a health authority's ability to use the resources with which it is provided for health rather than social services.

I hope that I have demonstrated that there is an underlying problem of a lack of residential home care places in South Cambridgeshire. I shall refer in particular to Meadowcroft home in Trumpington, which is not a local authority home, but is owned by the Red Cross. It formerly had some 20 places, but, in March 1997, the Red Cross decided that it should close—at a time when South Cambridgeshire can scarcely afford to lose residential care places.

The Red Cross has presented three arguments as to why it is necessary to close Meadowcroft. The first was that it was non-viable. It is clear that it was once perfectly viable, but the decisions to run the home down, not to take additional placements to reduce the number of residents and to discontinue a contract with the Lifespan community trust for two respite care beds have made it no longer viable. Secondly, it was argued that the home needed considerable investment to bring it up to registration standards. As a royal charter body, the Red Cross is not required to bring its homes up to registration standards. It would be desirable to do so if it were planned for the home to provide long-term care for new residents, but the existing residents see absolutely no reason for their living standards to be changed. Thirdly, it was argued that the remaining residents could and should be moved as it would be in their interests. However, it is perfectly apparent that they do not need full-time nursing care. Meadowcroft is a residential care home, not a nursing home, and is perfectly capable of supporting its residents.

After a period of rundown, Meadowcroft has only four remaining residents, all over 90-years-old. Two of them were among the first lady medical practitioners in Cambridge, who were part of a three-handed practice before the war. Dr. Margaret Reed is 98 years old and Dr. Joan Cooper is 106 years old. Last week, Dr. Cooper told me that she qualified as a medical practitioner in 1920. They are distinguished constituents of mine and they have provided a considerable service to the local community and to the Red Cross in the past.

I understand—not least because I have spoken to those who took the decision—that the decision to close the home was made with good intentions and that the Red Cross seeks to focus its activities on short-term emergency care. However, I continue to contend that bureaucracies and committees are capable of making decisions that individuals would not make. If one asked the individuals involved whether they thought it right that, after 15 years residence at Meadowcroft, Dr. Cooper, who is 106 years old—although she is by no means frail for her age—should be moved as a consequence of a desire to close the home, no doubt they would reply no, but I fear that bureaucracies will continue to say yes. The time has come for that to stop.

I feel quite strongly about Meadowcroft: very frail or elderly people have been moved from places where they were happy and which they regarded as their home and, as the Minister knows, that can have adverse effects. Even if, viewed objectively—and not least by bureaucracies—a move is to better or more appropriate circumstances, it can be in the interests of the individuals concerned to

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remain in familiar surroundings where they are happy and content. Anyone visiting the Meadowcroft home in Trumpington will know that the residents are perfectly happy there and that they are well settled and looked after and capable of being sustained there if the Red Cross cares to sustain them.

I call on the Red Cross to fulfil the expectations of the residents; the intention of the original trust deed established by Lady Ida Darwin in 1946, under which a substantial bequest was made; and subsequent benefactions. I do not believe for a moment that any charitable donor to the Red Cross would begrudge its meeting its obligations in that way, especially as the home has made considerable contributions to Red Cross finances in the past.

I thank the House and the Minister for listening to these related issues. I hope that the Minister will recognise and respond to the problems experienced by south Cambridgeshire and my constituents relating to the provision of social services and the placements into residential home care beds. I hope that the Red Cross will listen to the debate and change its mind about its proposal to close the Meadowcroft home early next year and to require my constituents to move to alternative accommodation.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on securing a debate on this important subject, and thank him for his generous words of welcome at the beginning of his speech.

The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of issues around residential care. In doing so, he has emphasised the links with the national health service. He is right to do so. In Cambridge, as elsewhere, the NHS is an integral part of community care. He also raised the issue of the closure of the Meadowcroft home in Trumpington, to which I shall refer later.

It may help if I begin by talking about the aim of community care, which is to provide the support that frail or vulnerable people need to live in their own homes or homely settings, retaining the independence, dignity and quality of life that come from being a part of the community. Social services, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, have a central role here, but as one of several partners, along with housing authorities and the NHS. Each partner needs to understand the others and to draw effectively on their contribution to overall care provision.

Social services have the lead in community care planning. In Cambridgeshire, as elsewhere, that is about planning and commissioning a balanced range of services—including residential care—to enable authorities locally to meet the assessed care needs of individual service users.

People's needs do not recognise organisational boundaries. That was one of the themes of the hon. Gentleman's speech. In the case of older people particularly, they are often complex. They also change both in the short term and over a longer period. Following a period in hospital, people may need additional support, perhaps from the community health service, if they are to return to their homes; or they may need a residential care place if discharge is not to be delayed or unnecessary readmission caused. We need to consider residential care provision within the broad context of community care services, mapping out the key links with the NHS, housing and other agencies.

In planning residential care, in Cambridgeshire as elsewhere, what is important is joined-up thinking in the wider community care and health context. Residential and nursing home care provision is closely linked with hospital discharge arrangements, rehabilitation services, domiciliary support and current work on prevention.

The interdependence of health and social care make it essential that the provider agencies collaborate effectively in service planning and commissioning, assessment and delivery, and not least, funding. Section 28A of the National Health Service Act 1977 has long been a key funding mechanism enabling health authorities to support social services. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want to give the impression that the new Government are approaching the issue any differently from their predecessor. That mechanism includes supporting residential and nursing home placements through "dowries" and similar payments in respect of people transferring out of long-stay hospitals, and supporting innovative cross-agency service.

We are providing a positive agenda of change. Joined-up thinking and partnership between health and local government run through our agenda. We have an ambitious programme of review and reform including the royal commission on long-term care, the forthcoming social services White Paper and our charter on long-term care. Other examples include the better services for vulnerable people initiative and "Partnership in Action: New Opportunities for Joint Working Between Health and Social Services", the recent discussion document trailed in last year's "The New NHS" White Paper. It might be helpful to say a little about that context before returning specifically to residential care, to social services funding and to arrangements in South Cambridgeshire.

Collaboration between local authorities and the NHS is considered in detail in the recent discussion paper "Partnership in Action", which sets out plans for a new statutory duty of partnership. Much of the paper is about collaborative funding mechanisms, such as proposals for the new NHS Bill to provide for health and social services to pool budgets, delegate functions and resources to each other in lead commissioning arrangements or develop integrated provision of services. It also envisages a significant widening of health authority powers under section 28A of the 1977 Act, with funding going to local authorities in support of objectives set out in health improvement programmes.

Last December, following our manifesto commitment, we established a royal commission on the funding of long-term care for elderly people. The commission is looking at demographics and future levels of need, different models of provision and how it should be funded. The commission is due to report around the end of the year.

Last year, in an executive letter, "Better Services for Vulnerable People", we set out the medium-term agenda for people with continuing health and social care needs. The circular asked local and health authorities to take forward work in three areas: first, drawing up joint

investment plans; secondly, establishing a national framework for multi-disciplinary assessments of older people in acute and community health settings, carried out jointly with social services; and thirdly, developing a range of recuperation and rehabilitation services for older people.

Further guidance on the better services initiative was issued in August by the NHS executive and the Department's social care regions. Joint investment plans are a distillation of the health improvement plan and community care planning information. They bring together in a single document the joint information needed for health and social services to deliver on their respective responsibilities. The recent guidance requires health and local authorities to have JIPs in place by April 1999, as a minimum, for older people, including those with mental health problems.

Multi-disciplinary assessments by health and social services have always been a joint responsibility in community care. More effective multi-disciplinary assessment means better co-ordination of care services. In the community, it may avoid unnecessary hospital admission and allow older people to remain in their own homes for longer; within the hospital setting, good multi-disciplinary assessments may avoid an unnecessary admission subsequently to institutional care. Similarly, developing recuperation and rehabilitation services will enable people to return to the community sooner and to remain in their own homes. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that is common sense.

Those are also key themes in the forthcoming social services White Paper, giving the context within which services such as residential care must be seen and developed. We should be aiming to maximise independence rather than supporting dependency. We need a new emphasis on rehabilitation, recuperation and prevention services. Crucially, the White Paper programme is underpinned by the personal social services settlement—an additional £2.8 billion over three years secured in the comprehensive spending review.

Last winter, an additional £269 million was allocated for tackling winter pressures. While that money was non-recurrent, it was not just elastoplast for the winter. It provided an opportunity for longer-term improvements in services, relationships and systems. Among the priorities applied in allocating the funds were plans that would reduce delays in discharging patients and reduce the need for people to be admitted to hospital in the first place, for example by strengthening primary, community and social services.

Winter pressures were well managed by social services departments, health authorities, trusts and other agencies working in partnership. Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority received £1.4 million of the £15.174 million available to the Anglia and Oxford region. Nearly £1 million of that went to social services to enable the discharge of delayed patients at Addenbrooke's, Hinchingbrooke and Lifespan into nursing and residential homes.

Let us look ahead to the coming winter. Last week, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that we would find a further £250 million to help the national health service and social services to cope with 1998–99 winter pressures. The English share of that total is £209 million. On Monday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced how the first £159 million would be allocated. That will build on the success of our measures last winter by again tackling discharge and unnecessary admissions and by strengthening community-based services. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me and his fellow Cambridgeshire Members in welcoming the additional £14.67 million that the Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority will have at its disposal in the next year. That is a 4.1 per cent. real-terms increase. I am sure that the money will be used to address some of the concerns that he has raised.

Once again, health authorities will be encouraged to use section 28A to transfer resources for joint schemes to social service departments when appropriate. In some pressure spots, that will mean purchasing extra long-term placements in residential and nursing homes. We would also expect social services to be supported to invest in community-based rehabilitative and recuperative care.

Mr. Lansley: I am sorry to interrupt the Minister. Will he clarify that the £14.7 million to which he refers is an increase in the overall allocation to Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority? Is he yet able to say what winter pressures money is available for the year ahead and whether there will be continuing support to follow up that money?

Mr. Hutton: The £14.7 million includes the additional allocation for winter pressures in the forthcoming period. The money has been treated together.

Decisions on the level of local authority expenditure are taken each year, following detailed discussions with the local authority associations. In setting the level of expenditure for each of the main services, the Government take account of anticipated pressures on those services. Resources are distributed on the basis of standard spending assessments.

Spending priorities vary from area to area and no one is better placed to assess those priorities than the authorities locally. Some 90 per cent. of resources for social services are allocated to the local authority on an unhypothecated basis. Authorities are free to choose how best to allocate the money internally.

Cambridgeshire's standard spending assessment per head is below the national average, but the hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that the SSA reflects the relative need for social services in an area, which research has shown to be linked to the extent of social deprivation. Cambridgeshire is a less deprived area overall, so we might expect it to have less social need than the average authority. For example, in 1996, around 15 per cent. of people over 60 in Cambridgeshire were on income support, compared with more than 40 per cent. in Tower Hamlets and Hackney. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the change made last year in distributing the elderly residential SSA for Cambridgeshire, mentioning a figure of £1.4 million. That allocation was made after extensive independent work by the University of Kent on the characteristics of people requiring local authority assistance. There is no question of Cambridgeshire being unfairly treated in the allocation or victimised by the change in the method of distributing resources.

We intend to ensure that social service budgets are given the right priority among the many services receiving Government support. We recently announced that funding for social services would rise by more than 3 per cent. above inflation for each of the next three years.

[Mr. Hutton]

The hon. Gentleman referred to the closure of the Meadowcroft home in Trumpington. I am sure that he appreciates that decisions about the commercial viability of individual homes are not matters for Ministers in the Department of Health. When residents have to move because of the closure of a home, I expect local authorities and health authorities to work together to ensure that the arrangements are appropriate and are handled sensitively. I understand how traumatic it can be for frail, elderly and vulnerable people, such as the hon. Gentleman's constituents, who have to move from residential care or a nursing home that has become their true home. We are not in a position to prevent the closure of an independent home if the home owner or the organisation running it considers it to be no longer viable. I repeat the message that we have sent to many organisations in this field—we expect local authorities and health authorities to work sensitively to manage the movement of those very frail and vulnerable people.

In conclusion, I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire for giving the House an opportunity to discuss some very important issues. In the longer term, we are aware of the need to develop a fair and sustainable method of funding long-term residential care, and I look forward to future opportunities to debate those issues more fully in the House.

Planning Applications (Waverley)

12.59 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I am pleased to have this Adjournment debate on an issue that some would say is, in a sense, history—a planning application in my constituency, one or two aspects of which were unique. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is familiar with the case.

The planning application was for an opencast coal site where work was completed in 1982—a long time ago—and which was reclaimed in 1994 for commercial development. Some 65 out of 90 acres have been reclaimed. The planning application was to use the first 20 acres of the site. I should add that next to the site is the Orgreave opencast coal mine, where there is a massive scheme—one of the biggest in Europe—to clean up industrial dereliction. When that work is finished, some 800 acres of land will be available for use—all of it ex-industrial or brown-field site land.

The local authority, Rotherham borough council, is working up a master plan for the whole site which may include business and industrial use, leisure, housing, a shopping centre, schools and open space. In effect, we are looking at producing a new community on the site.

The application was made by an American company, AMC, which, in a letter to the Government's regional office in January 1997, said:

"AMC Europe is the subsidiary of AMC Entertainment Inc., one of the largest cinema circuits in the USA, and we are considering a redeployment in the UK, where AMC pioneered the Multiplex complex in the mid eighties, thus initiating a spectacular growth of the cinema attendance (from 45 million tickets sold in 1985 to close to 130 million in 1996.) Our target within the next decade is to build approximately 10 4-6,000 seat—20-30 screen multiplexes integrated in full entertainment centres around the major metropolitan areas of the UK."

It is clear that the implications go far wider than the application for the site in my constituency.

The letter continued:

"Our objective in Waverley is, by using the synergy between the cinema and the other restaurant and leisure activities planned on site, to generate a sufficient critical mass to turn the site into a true leisure destination, thus attracting customers from a much larger catchment area than a traditional multiplex".

The plans that I saw proposed a catchment area from West Yorkshire to the middle of Nottinghamshire. The letter continued:

"The Waverley Park site is well adapted to the development of our concept, due to the large catchment area, the excellent access and relatively few competing leisure schemes."

The letter said that the company had built a similar project in Portugal in December 1996, and that there was a clear demand for multiplexes.

The leisure industry report for 1998 says that there are approximately 110 multiplexes in this country, which begs the question: how many more can the UK take before saturation point is reached? This is all relevant to the Secretary of State's decision on the project. Operators' opinions on how many more multiplexes the country could take differ, but the average seems to be between 80 and 100. The development plans of the UK's established multiplex operators clearly reflect the current strength. This is a big area for growth in the British economy.

AMC's application was submitted in 1996 and went on its journey through the Government regional office, which I visited in September 1996. I had been approached by the developers, and I was interested in the cultural change in activity in my constituency which, as hon. Members will know, has suffered from the rundown of its basic industries for more than a decade. To my knowledge, it was the only proposal for the site, and I was excited about it.

As ever with planning applications that are called in by the Government, the decision took a long time. I understand that, even after the general election, there were several meetings in the DTI about whether to call in the application for a public inquiry. Ministers asked for more information, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary asked for details in relation to planning policy guidance note 6—the alternative site test—and PPG13, concerning public transport.

That information was sent in by the planning authority in June this year, yet it took until September before the final decision to have a public inquiry was made by the Secretary of State—something that I did not want and had lobbied against. The decision was communicated to the developers by letter on 25 September. The time scale about which we are talking is from July 1996 until 25 September, when the decision was taken. That is a long time to ask someone who is preparing to invest millions of pounds into a project to wait.

The criteria laid down by the public inquiry were known by the Department. The Department had asked about PPG6 and PPG13 only a few months before, and had been given a comprehensive report about the tests by the planning authority. The Department also asked about accessibility by a choice of means of transport and the likely effects on travel patterns and car use; the likely impact on the vitality and viability of existing town centres; whether there was a clearly defined need which could not be accommodated in or on the edge of existing centres, and particularly whether smaller-scale developments could be located in town centre or edge-of-centre sites; and whether there has been a proper sequential approach to site selection.

At the pre-inquiry meeting in March, my constituency office was represented by Sheena Woolley—who has worked for me for many years—and she took evidence, in shorthand, of what was said by the different parties who were called by the planning inspector. It became clear at that stage that the South Yorkshire passenger transport executive was not prepared to give evidence because

"they fell between two groups."

I assume that that meant that they fell between one of the principal objectors, Sheffield city council, and Rotherham borough council, the planning authority which wanted the scheme to go ahead. Both authorities sit on the South Yorkshire passenger transport executive.

I would like to mention someone else who was at that meeting and who had done a lot of work in relation to the project—Rotherham borough councillor, Reg Littleboy, who had collected a lot of signatures in a petition from the local community to support the application. Reg gave evidence at the inquiry.

I attended the public inquiry twice during the four days that it sat. I gave evidence on the fourth day, and what I witnessed—and what was reported in the local press—was hardly about the wider issues in relation to the site. It was more like a report of a bad neighbour dispute; in my 15 years in the House, I have always tried to avoid such disputes as they are so difficult to solve. Unfortunately, that was how it panned out in the media and during some of the discussions. I am pleased to say that the neighbours are now having constructive discussions about co-existence with one another, and I welcome the co-operation between the two planning authorities.

The inspector's report was clear—he rejected the application. Two issues were involved. The first was public transport and, on that, he seemed to look no further than the end of his nose. The single planning application was for a 20-acre site, but the development would eventually cover 800 acres. Planning law is restrictive in that one cannot look at the wider picture when deciding on individual schemes. Perhaps we should look into that. The inspector's overall conclusion was that

"the proposed leisure park would be primarily reliant upon the private car",

and I accept that. That is the reality for out-of-town developments, and I do not hide from it. However, the inspector gave no weight to the benefits of the park-and-ride scheme that had been proposed for the site. It is a cart-and-horse situation: do we get transport by planning for it, or by demand? I believe that it is demand led, and I am sure that public transport on the site will be more than adequate when that site is fully developed.

I am well aware of what can happen with out-of-town developments. The Meadowhall retail complex is only three miles from the site. It was built in the 1980s without a public inquiry and with no objection from the planning authority, and it is still being developed. Meadowhall is an enormously popular place for people to visit and spend their money. The slogan in advertisements on regional television states that it has parking spaces for 12,000 cars. That is what sells it.

At present, the private car is the overwhelming choice of transport for the individual. We cannot use the planning process to force people on to public transport. One can lay down stipulations to improve access and a line has to be taken, but refusing planning permission is not the way to do it. We should consider other ways, and making the buses more affordable would be a good start. We must recognise that they now run for profit. Public transport is not what it was a decade ago. In my constituency, buses have stopped running to certain villages in rural areas because such services are not profitable. It is not the public service that it used to be. I do not know how the Government will square that, but it has to be done.

The South Yorkshire passenger transport executive should have given evidence on the public transport aspects. It decided not to do so and I believe that it was got at—by whom I am not sure. Its written representation to the public inquiry is recorded in paragraph 143 of the inspector's report, which states:

"The South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive . . . was opposed in principle to the out of centre location of the proposal, which was contrary to the transport policies in the South Yorkshire Joint Transport Package Bid and to Government planning guidelines."

That view contrasts with a letter that the PTE sent to interested parties dated 10 July 1997, which stated:

"I can confirm that the Transport Executive is now satisfied that your development proposals can be adequately served by public transport.

We note that in addition to the provision of public transport infrastructure, you have indicated your willingness to support late evening bus services and are prepared to enter into agreements for the allocation of certain parking spaces for park and ride use."

The passenger transport executive was not hiding its head in the sand and wanted to use the site to improve transport where it could.

After I gave evidence at the public inquiry and questioned why the SYPTE had not done so, I received a letter from the executive, dated 13 May 1998, which stated:

"I had some feedback from my officers who were present at the inquiry regarding your own comments and also those relating to the PTE's initial objection . . . I am quite happy to meet with you to discuss your concerns".

I was unhappy at the situation and did not take up the offer, but wrote to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport to tell him of my concern regarding the passenger transport executive's lack of action on the matter and the fact that it was not willing to give evidence about public transport. I received a reply from my right hon. Friend saying that, although he could appreciate my concern

"SYPTE chose not to give public evidence at the Public Inquiry. However, I have to say there is no compulsion on third parties to do so and that is not a matter in which I could intervene."

He suggested that I should pursue my concerns with the PTE.

This is not a matter for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary today, but it is scandalous that a publicly funded quango, which is what the SYPTE is, was not prepared to give evidence at a public inquiry. Taxpayers pay for that organisation to have opinions on public transport. It is atrocious that contradictory messages have resulted because it did not take the stand to give evidence at the inquiry. Although this debate is retrospective, I should point out that the organisation has done itself a disservice by not doing so.

The other issue in the report is the sequential test on site selection. In paragraph 191, the inspector states:

"In applying the sequential test, it was agreed that there is no single site in or on the edge of either Sheffield city centre or Rotherham town centre which could accommodate either the whole leisure park or the 24 screen cinema alone . . . However, to my mind the sequential test could always be thwarted if that was the correct basis for the assessment, by proposing development of such a large scale that it could rarely, if ever, be housed in or on the edge of a centre."

I must agree with the inspector there. Developers could easily exploit the situation, saying that they needed to use a green-field site—20 acres of countryside—because they could not find comparable acreage in a town or city centre.

The inspector goes on to say:

"To satisfy the sequential test, I consider it to be necessary to examine whether the individual elements of the proposal could be provided for on city centre or town centre or edge of centre sites. That should include consideration of whether smaller cinemas could be accommodated on such sites."

The following paragraph states:

"Applying the sequential test on that basis, a need for 24 further cinema screens could be accommodated in Sheffield city centre"—

pretty conclusive, I guess. The inspector continues:

"The Castlegate and Heart of the City redevelopment sites have the capability to provide that number of screens in 2 separate cinemas . . . Neither site is likely to be available to the applicants in this case, as other developers are involved."

The inspector states that the development should be in the city centre, but that the developers can forget it because they will not be able to build there.

Paragraph 197 of the report states:

"I have concluded that there is no clearly defined need for the development proposed which could not be accommodated in or on the edge of existing centres, provided that flexibility is applied to the form of the development, both in terms of the size of the cinema, and of the willingness to accept that the individual elements of the scheme could be built on separate sites."

That reads like a page from the five-year plan of some centrally controlled state.

We must recognise that leisure is the fastest growing industry in the United Kingdom. It is also the biggest. It is bigger than the whole of manufacturing industry and it creates more jobs than any other sector—one in five new jobs created in the next 10 years will be in leisure and hospitality.

If coalfield areas, such as the one that I represent, are to be regenerated, they will need a share if the town and city test is the only criterion applied. Coal mining jobs were lost not in towns and city centres but in areas such as Rother Valley and the constituencies represented by my hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) and for Wentworth (Mr. Healey), who are in the Chamber.

At the Labour party conference in Blackpool in October, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"You know the Tories ripped the heart out of the pit communities. We are determined to put the heart back into them, offering jobs and hope, instead of despair and the dole."

I never thought that I would say this, but my right hon. Friend's words rang hollow for me and my constituents, who, a few days before, had lost a £30 million inward investment package that would have created 570 jobs.

The more I consider this issue, the more concerned I am about the Government's approach to out-of-town development. That concern is shared by others. The *Estates Gazette* said in October that the Government had commissioned a consultant's report on the economic consequences of planning for the business sector and cited some negative comments about planning and PPG6. Mr. Huw Williams, the development policy manager for Sainsbury, said:

"people had broadly understood the agenda and understood what the sequential approach was about, but now we're beginning to see new considerations being brought into play . . . It's as if someone had gone back to PPG6 and highlighted new bits such as car parking and the exact relationship between edge-of-centre and town centre."

On 7 November, the paper carried an article headed "PPG6 upset in High Court". It stated that food store developers no longer had to prove need to obtain planning permission. It cited a partner at the firm Healey and Baker, who said that there had been a move over the past year or two to demand that developers demonstrated need. The article continued:

"This watershed decision will reassure developers that they don't have to. It should give the government cause to clarify its policy and iron out inconsistencies in the way PPG6 has been interpreted."

I recognise that some of those voices are laced with vested interest. Some people may say that I have a vested interest, too, but my interest is the good of my

constituency. My concern is that proposals to begin the regeneration of a coalfield area are blocked by unclear planning guidelines. I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is reviewing planning matters, but how long is that process likely to take? I have been talking about one planning application for the site, but I hope that, now that that application has been blocked, there will be many more.

Will my hon. Friend also consider the difficult and perhaps unique problems of the coalfield areas and fully recognise the wider social and economic problems there, some of which can be addressed by the flexible and sensitive application of the planning guidelines? I know that, next month, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will make an announcement on the coalfields task force, but it is important that any review should recognise the great difficulties that coalfield areas face.

I recognise and support the Government's commitment to the regeneration of our cities and towns. I know that, with the local planning authority, they are doing a good job in transforming Rotherham town centre. However, if we are serious about the plight of former coalfield areas, a careful balance must be struck, so that the problems caused by the rundown of coal mining can be tackled.

I realise that I have not left my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary much time in which to respond—he may be grateful for that, as he will not have to comment on everything that I have said—but I should be grateful for an assurance that reviews will recognise where the markets are, and not focus solely on the needs of towns and city centres.

1.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on his success in securing this debate. He has referred specifically to the refusal of planning permission for a large leisure development at the former opencast site in Rotherham district at Waverley near Sheffield. I know that he has taken a close interest in the matter and that he has been both assiduous and forceful in pressing the case for development, which he believed would bring substantial benefits to his constituents.

As my hon. Friend said, the case was decided, following an exhaustive public inquiry, by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, in his capacity as Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The inquiry inspector, having carefully considered all the material considerations in the case, concluded that the proposed development was in fundamental conflict with Government policy as set out in PPG6 and PPG13. My right hon. Friend concurred with the inspector's clear recommendation and refused consent accordingly.

All planning decisions are taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations—including national land use planning policies and policies on town centres, retail and leisure development and transport—suggest otherwise. The Government have a responsibility to defend town centres against large out-of-centre shopping and leisure developments that are likely to harm the vitality and viability of town centres. My hon. Friend will be aware that the recent Environment Select Committee report on shopping centres recommended that Ministers took a tough approach on applications for large leisure developments, so that further damage to town centres could be avoided. In their response, the Government stated their commitment to ensuring that the approach in PPG6 to retail development is applied as firmly to leisure developments.

The criteria for assessing large out-of-centre leisure developments, such as that proposed for the Waverley site, include the likely harm to the strategy in the development plan, the impact on the vitality and viability of nearby town centres, accessibility by a choice of means of transport and overall travel patterns. There should also be a flexibly applied sequential approach to site selection, so that out-of-centre locations are considered only when the development cannot be accommodated in town centre or edge-of-centre locations.

All planning applications for major leisure developments must be considered against those criteria. Moreover, PPG6 states that town and district centres should be the preferred locations for developments that attract many trips and PPG13 states that, by planning land use and transport so that people can carry out their everyday activities with less need to travel, local planning authorities can reduce reliance on the car and contribute to reaching the environmental goals that are set out in the Government's sustainable development strategy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley has forcefully expressed his disappointment about the Waverley decision. However, he would agree, I am sure, that it would be wrong to suggest that nothing is being done to support and regenerate the coalfield communities. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has given a high priority to action to assist those communities. The South Yorkshire coalfield areas have benefited from a wide range of regeneration activities, which have been undertaken with help, for example, from English Partnerships and the single regeneration budget.

My right hon. Friend was instrumental in setting up the coalfields task force in October 1997, with a remit to pioneer options for revitalising the former coalfield communities that were affected by pit closure programmes. The task force's report "Making the Difference", which was published in June 1998, contained recommendations for regenerating coalfields communities and was warmly received. My right hon. Friend gave the Government's initial response to the report in July. He said:

> "The Coalfields Task Force's vision was to set up a framework which will empower communities to create their own new start. This Government is committed to do its part to make this vision a reality. I want to put a powerful framework in place to deliver a comprehensive programme of regeneration for our coalfields communities."

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will launch the Government's action plan for the coalfields, and a detailed response to the task force report, at a second coalfields conference on 1 December at Peterlee leisure centre in County Durham. I understand my hon. Friend's disappointment at the Waverley decision, but I hope that he will agree that the Government are taking many initiatives to respond to the needs of the coalfield communities.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

The process of reviewing and modernising planning is under way, and revisions to various planning policy guidelines will be issued over a period. There is a strong focus on speeding up the planning process, and I agree that we need to ensure that there is not undue delay in considering applications.

I will relay to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport my hon. Friend's comments about the South Yorkshire passenger transport executive not giving evidence.

Road Haulage (Taxation)

1.30 pm

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I thank your office, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the two Departments involved, for co-operating on the change of title for this debate so that a Treasury Minister could respond to it.

We have a strategic industry that is in real crisis: 95 per cent. of all freight is moved by road—in a rural area such as my constituency, the figure is as high as 97 per cent.—and there is no real alternative for the foreseeable future. The most optimistic estimates suggest that, even if the huge projected investment in rail freight for the next 10 years were to materialise, that would only double the rail share, from 5 to 11 per cent. Road would continue to expand and would probably hold steady at about 90 per cent. of freight transport.

Our whole economy depends on maintaining an efficient road haulage industry. No business—or family—does not use goods that were moved at some stage by road. There is not an hon. Member here today who is not wearing clothing or who has not eaten food in the Tea Room that was carried at some stage by a diesel-powered vehicle. The average Sainsbury store has 23,000 items, all carried by road.

There are 420,000 commercial vehicles of more than 3.5 tonnes in the United Kingdom and they move more than 1.6 billion tonnes of goods, yet the future of the 65,000 road haulage businesses is in jeopardy. By 2002, the current crisis may have caused 26,000 job losses, and a loss to gross domestic product of £1.5 billion and to the Treasury of £1 billion; and the Government are entirely to blame. One of the few remaining areas of taxation over which each nation state in the European Union has retained 100 per cent. of its decision-making powers is the setting of fuel and vehicle excise duty.

The Government are using their power in a bizarre manner, actively putting a strategic industry at a massive disadvantage. The fuel duty escalator was introduced in 1993, in response to the Rio commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It was originally set at the retail price index plus 3 per cent., but the Labour Government increased it to RPI plus 6 per cent. in 1997, adding a further gratuitous 1p per litre on diesel in the 1998 Budget.

The House of Commons Library calculates that Labour has added £9 billion of extra fuel duties during this Parliament. The escalator on diesel and petrol this year gave more to the Treasury than 1p on income tax would have done. By 2002, the policy will cost the haulage industry £5 billion a year.

Ninety-nine per cent. of lorries are diesel-fuelled, and fuel represents a minimum of 30 per cent. of the operating costs of running a lorry. According to the Library, 82 per cent. of the price of fuel in the United Kingdom is taxation. Each 38-tonne vehicle pays £22,000 a year in tax. There is a widening gap between the UK and our continental competitors. Excluding VAT, UK diesel costs about 56p a litre, of which duty is 44.99p; in France, it costs 35p a litre, of which duty is only 24.57p. The 21p a litre—or 95p a gallon—difference means that to fill a truck with two tanks, which takes 1,200 litres, costs £252 more in the UK than in France. The comparisons with Benelux and Germany are even worse.

My constituents are in desperate trouble. Dale Roberts, from Morda, wrote to me and said:

"The 5.5p per litre increase on diesel is slowly but surely strangling the industry as there is no way in which we can claim this increase back. Our customers are in much the same situation as ourselves with an appalling cashflow problem. Unless something is done, and soon, the haulage industry of this country will be in a decline from which it will find it very hard to crawl back."

Mr. Jagger, from Pentre, who handles timber—notably, he took the timber down to St. George's hall for the restoration of Windsor castle—wrote to me in July. He said:

"At this present and proposed taxation, it is going to become impossible to continue to operate to an acceptable standard. Unless the Government comes to its senses many good hauliers will go to the wall with many people losing their jobs."

There is even worse—possibly much worse—to come. Vehicle excise duty on a 38-tonne truck costs £3,210 in the UK; only £459 in France; and a mere £296 in Spain. A typical international haulier in the UK, running 50 trucks, was £150,000 worse off than his Spanish competitor before he even got out of bed on 1 January this year; yet the Chancellor has already said that he has plans to make new heavier lorries subject to even higher rates, to discourage their use.

Andrew Wishart, in Kirkcaldy, has 16 trucks and has told me that, if the four-by-two-axle VED goes up to the rumoured level of £7,000 to £9,000, he will move abroad. He transports car parts and telecommunications parts to eastern and southern Europe, so he drives through Belgium, and he is already taking steps to set up a base and an office in Belgium.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): My hon. Friend is understating the case, as all this is happening in the context of an agricultural economy in decline. Many haulage firms are based in rural areas such as my constituency and his, and they are already facing other problems. The burden of extra duty comes on top of an agricultural and rural crisis.

Mr. Paterson: As always, my hon. Friend is spot on. I was about to cite the case of a haulier who transports lambs from Carlisle to Newtown and now has to pay an extra £60 for each load. That is an extra burden on the sheep industry, which is in real crisis, as my hon. Friend and I are well aware.

Eddie Stobart's name will be familiar to most hon. Members from his 800 very smart red and green lorries. He employs about 2,500 people. If he moved to France today, he would save £2.2 million on VED alone. If the proposed hike on heavier vehicles goes through, it will be even worse. Yesterday, he said to me on the telephone, "Unless the Government sees sense on fuel and VED, I will have actively to consider cheaper alternatives to running my business based in the UK."

That is a major worry for me, because distribution is a major business in North Shropshire. It is run by the entrepreneurs whom the Government lecture us that we should have: the people who have built up businesses from nothing. The Woodward family in Oswestry began importing sausages in the back of their car, and kept them in their garage; in recent years, they have invested £15 million in a state-of-the-art distribution centre and they have 89 trucks.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): May I instance another Shropshire business, owned by Mr. Owen of Lydbury North who tells me that, of a fuel bill last year of £28,500, £24,795—no less—was duty?

Mr. Paterson: As always, my hon. Friend has his feet on the ground and knows what is going on.

The increases cannot be passed on. Nigel Woodward told me that he

"cannot get any increase from his customers."

The Penton family, down the road from the Woodwards, have invested £12 million. According to Andrew Penton, they

"are seriously considering flagging out, and they have slowed their expansion plans here."

The only relief on VED is the £500 allowance offered by the Government to encourage vehicles to be fitted with particulate traps, enabling them to use low-sulphur diesel. That sounds a good idea, but the conversion kits alone cost £3,500; low-sulphur diesel is extremely hard to find, when one eventually finds it, it is more expensive than conventional diesel; and, unbelievably, it is 5 per cent. less efficient than ordinary diesel. Not surprisingly, I have yet to find a haulier who is tempted by the Government's kind offer.

For the time being, the Government are milking rewards from the policy, but the long-term consequences for Government revenue are serious. I talked last week to an international haulier based in Kettering who deals exclusively with Italy and Spain. He has not filled up one of his 20 trucks in the United Kingdom in the past 18 months. By 2002, more than £1 billion of tax revenue will be lost to the Exchequer from fuel being purchased abroad. Smuggling across the Irish border is rampant—it is estimated to cost between £100 million and £150 million. We do not know the exact figure, because the Government do not care. They are happy to lecture the workers of Rover on the need to be more efficient, but when my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) asked about the extent of cross-border smuggling, the Economic Secretary replied, in a written answer:

"HM Customs and Excise have no estimates for the revenue lost to the Exchequer through these activities."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. *1201*.]

One way in which the Government could raise revenue is through tolls. British trucks running through the Benelux countries and Germany pay £4.20 a day for a vignette and, as we know, autoroute tolls in France and Italy are even higher. A truck last week running from Calais to Mont Blanc paid £95 for the one-way trip. Vehicle excise duty is adjusted in those countries to allow for the tolls, but the House of Commons Library has told me that 600,000 foreign-registered goods vehicles left the UK for mainland Europe in 1997. The industry feels bitter that no charge is levied on such trucks, which can come here when they like. They can be any weight and put out any kind of pollution. The Government intend to penalise heavy trucks, but not if they come from Europe.

As a free trader, I welcomed the arrival of cabotage on 1 July, which enabled the free movement of goods within the European Union by any European Union haulier,

[Mr. Paterson]

but that is no good if the game is rigged against the UK haulier. French trucks with a range of 1,200 to 1,300 miles can easily reach Shropshire and clock up 600 miles of profitable business before returning to Calais to fuel up and take advantage of cheaper VED under the more sensible regime of the French Government. My constituent, Martin Edge, said today:

"We welcome competition, but it must be fair. Our current position is disastrous."

A further, sinister implication arises from information I learned from a haulier in Lincoln last week, who already has six vehicles registered in France. He said:

"There is a significant difference in the quality of the annual MOT test. Here in the UK it is rigorous and it is right that it should be. By comparison French MOT test standards are lower across the board. The brake test is a complete joke."

A proud, successful industry has been brought to its knees because the Government believe that they have found a source of revenue that will not bite back. I have been in correspondence with the Financial Secretary since April. The replies have been as complacent and lacking in understanding and information as they have been late in arriving. My letter of 20 July, which enclosed a letter from Billy Griffiths, a major local employer, received a reply only on 24 September.

The Minister stated:

"I am sorry for the delay in replying. This is due to parliamentary recess."

In a parliamentary recess, Ministers do not have tiresome Back Benchers such as myself calling them to Parliament to answer Adjournment debates. If a business were run so incompetently, it would have gone bust long ago. My requests to bring a delegation to meet the Minister have been constantly refused, but the presence at Westminster today of hundreds of truckers—who have come from Bury St. Edmunds, Shropshire, the south-west of England and many other places—testifies that they must win on the issue to survive. They must also win on behalf of every business in the land, because they are all made less competitive by the policy. Transport represents up to 10 per cent. of the price of many manufactured goods and 12 to 13 per cent. of retail distribution costs.

The whole economy is being damaged, and I shall give one example. Ten years ago, a site in Market Drayton was a green field. Today, it is a state-of-the-art plant making yoghurt for Müllers from 100 million litres of milk. Every one of those litres is taken there by a diesel-powered truck and every yoghurt pot is taken away by a diesel truck. That magnificent £60 million investment is a tribute to the policies that Conservative Governments introduced and to the work force of Market Drayton. It is a real success story and the Minister can enjoy the product in the Tea Room afterwards. However, I talked to the managing director this morning and he said:

"We are unable to pass on any of the increases in transport costs to our customers. Considering the huge investment, this is bitterly disappointing."

The intention of the policy is to improve air quality, but it will not do so. British hauliers will be forced to put off purchasing new, more efficient equipment and more work will be done by heavier, less-well-maintained and cared-for foreign trucks. The pollution will stay, but the polluter will not pay. New Labour claims to understand business. If that were true, the Labour Benches would be full. New Labours talks about productivity and global competition, but it has the power to change this policy. It is stupid and is damaging a key strategic industry, not to mention the whole economy.

I would like the Minister to answer two simple questions. Will she let me bring a delegation from the industry to see her before the Budget? Will she agree today to freeze any further increases in VED and fuel duty?

1.45 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I understand the passion that the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) brings to the debate, but I regret the fact that he did not mention the environmental considerations that stand behind the policy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, he did."] He paid almost no attention to those considerations and he paid no attention to the range of policies, which I am about to outline for him, that are designed to help the road haulage industry achieve our objective and theirs—to promote a British haulage industry that is sustainable, efficient and effective, and that also meets our environmental and social objectives.

Contrary to the implication in the hon. Gentleman's remarks, the industry has responded favourably to the approach to sustainable distribution that we set out in our White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport". For example, the industry has welcomed the fact that 40-tonne, five-axle lorries will be allowed for domestic use as well as for international movements, as we are obliged to do under European Union legislation. Those vehicles are no larger than existing 38-tonne vehicles. The industry has also endorsed our intention to improve enforcement in the industry through improvements in the efficiency of the enforcement agencies. We will ensure, for instance, that we get modern information technology systems into those agencies, which will allow much better co-ordination and sharing of data.

We have also heard from the industry an endorsement of our intention to impound illegally operated vehicles used by cowboy operators. The industry has been constructive in helping us to formulate those proposals, which will help to ensure that hauliers in the UK operate in a competitive regime, which is fair and honest. In the White Paper, we also stated that we will improve the service offered by trunk roads, by improving network control and traffic management. By maintaining and managing the existing road network better, we will reduce delays and improve the efficiency of the industry. All of us have wasted precious time sitting on crowded roads and seen necessary distribution vehicles also stuck in those queues. We will also introduce legislation to allow local authorities to charge road users to help to reduce congestion. That will benefit the haulage industry, because reduced congestion will lead to improved delivery time, efficiency and profitability.

We have also stated our intention to support the industry in promoting best practice, through quality partnerships and the Road Haulage Association's "Well Driven" scheme, which I and, I am sure, many other hon. Members have noticed increasingly on our roads. We intend to promote an industry that will support the country's economic growth and, at the same time, meet environmental objectives.

We are committed to achieving the United Kingdom's share of the European Union target agreed at Kyoto to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 8 per cent. by 2008–12. All motorists need to make a contribution to achieving that target. It is estimated that the road fuel duty escalator, if continued at its current level from 1996 until 2002, will save between 2 million and 5 million tonnes of carbon annually by 2010.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire expressed with great force his concern, and that of his constituents and many in the industry, about diesel price increases and changes to vehicle excise duty. Of course we know that increased fuel duties and VED impact on the costs facing the road transport industry and hauliers, but we believe that the cost of using lorries must fully reflect the cost that they impose, including environmental costs. I am surprised that Conservative Members, who are free traders and free marketers who should understand the need to incorporate environmental costs into accurate pricing, do not apply it to this industry.

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): Will the Minister deal with the problem at the core of the debate? How do the Government intend to tackle the problem of the level playing field? How are we going to stop British hauliers moving to France or Belgium? What do all the things that she says that she has done for the industry amount to in cash terms, compared with the extra burden so eloquently described by my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson)?

Ms Hewitt: Happily, I was just coming to that point.

We are conscious of the impact of higher fuel taxation and VED on competitiveness and profitability, but it needs to be put into a wider context. The United Kingdom has lower corporation taxes, lower employment taxes and lower social costs than other European Union countries, especially with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's recent Budget measures to assist small businesses. The overall tax burden is lower in the United Kingdom than in our major EU competitors and lower than the averages for the EU and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend) may not want to listen to the Minister but I do, so I must be able to hear her.

Ms Hewitt: Not only is the overall burden of taxation lower on British businesses—including the road haulage industry—than on European businesses, but, looking at business as a whole, transport is a relatively small part of total business costs.

Mr. Gill: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hewitt: No. I have already given way and would like to make some progress. Tax measures that we have recently introduced, or will introduce, to help road hauliers include the freezing of the standard VED rates for lorries. That means that lorry drivers are paying less VED in real terms than they were in 1990, and that partly offsets the impact of higher fuel duty and should help to maintain the competitive position of our road hauliers. A reduction of up to £500 in VED for low-emission lorries and buses will be introduced at the end of this year. There is also the freeze in duty on road fuel gases and the widened differential that we will maintain and, I hope, increase, in favour of ultra-low-sulphur diesel.

There were broader measures in the Budget that will benefit business and road hauliers: the 1 per cent. cut in the main rate of corporation tax; the 1 per cent. cut in the small companies rate of corporation tax, which next April will be down to 20 per cent; the introduction of quarterly payments for large companies, replacing advance corporation tax; the extension of enhanced temporary first year capital allowances; and the introduction of the taper to reduce the capital gains tax on assets held for longer periods, which is equivalent to a higher tax rate of 10 per cent. after 10 years on business assets.

Mr. Paterson: The Minister is getting on to the second page of the letters that I had from the Financial Secretary. We have been through all this; it is irrelevant to the items that I raised. She mentioned the environment, but why have not other European countries imposed a fuel escalator if it is such a good idea? They signed up to Kyoto. She talks about the contribution of the industry to the environment, but £30 billion is taken from road users while only £2 billion is spent on roads.

Ms Hewitt: The point of environmental taxation is to internalise the external costs imposed, in this case by road users, in the prices that they are charged, not necessarily to return the product of that revenue directly to them. Several EU member states, including the new German Government, are considering carefully proposals for carbon tax and energy tax. There are proposals at European level for an energy tax, which we will consider carefully.

Hon. Members raised the matter of competition from abroad. Despite what has been said, there is little evidence of foreign hauliers undercutting domestic hauliers for business in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Paterson: The Gallery is laughing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the Gallery twice, which is outwith the rules of the House. He should not do it.

Ms Hewitt: The fact is that less than 0.04 per cent. UK road miles are done by foreign hauliers. The long-term outlook for the industry in this country suggests that lorry traffic is expected to grow by more than 60 per cent. in the next 20 years, an enormous growth in that sector of the economy. That makes it imperative that the Government ensure, by effective use of taxation, that the lorries on the road are the most fuel efficient and environmentally friendly available.

Under EU legislation—I think that the hon. Member for North Shropshire welcomed this—hauliers are free to set up business anywhere in the European Union. That is a commercial decision for the businesses involved. Let me remind him that many other factors are involved besides the prospect of cheaper vehicle licence or fuel tax:

[Ms Hewitt]

the setting up costs; the burden of obtaining an operator's licence; higher drivers' wages; considerably higher social costs; higher corporation tax rates—and so on. Setting up a business on the continent has all those obvious costs. When all taxation is taken into account, the burden on business in the United Kingdom is lower than in other European Union states. Any British haulier who decided to set up in France or Belgium might find that road fuel taxes went down, but would certainly find that his social costs and wages bill went up. It is not surprising, when one considers the overall burden on business, that there have also been reports in the trade press of French hauliers registering their businesses in the United Kingdom to take advantage of lower business costs and the opportunities to grow their businesses.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire suggested that environmental taxes are simply an excuse for revenue raising. That is not the case. We are developing environmental taxes in line with the statement of intent on environmental taxation and with a vital principle both of market economics and of environmental concerns: prices should reflect true costs so that the polluter pays. Fuel duty increases are important to encourage further improvements in fuel efficiency and reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. Our spending is directed towards the people's priorities of education and health, from which everyone benefits, but also to increased spending on rural transport, which, as I hope that he agrees, will be of particular benefit to rural communities.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire raised specific questions about ultra-low-sulphur diesel. The early signs are that supermarkets will be able to sell ordinary and ultra-low-sulphur diesel at the same price, so UK refiners should be able to compete. In any case, we envisage altering the duty differential further in favour of ULSD. We believe that increased duty differential will further encourage the manufacture and use of the fuel. We need to look many years ahead, because ULSD offers substantial benefits to the quality of urban areas by reducing the amount of nitrogen oxide, black smoke and particulates produced during combustion. I know from my constituents how much concern there is not only about global warming, but about local air quality, because local pollution is one of the causes of the disturbing increase in asthma among children. I hope that all hon. Members would wish to take account of that.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire referred with concern to his correspondence with my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER PLC (GROUP REORGANISATION) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 17 November.

ALLIANCE & LEICESTER PLC (GROUP REORGANISATION) BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That the promoters of the Alliance & Leicester plc (Group Reorganisation) Bill [*Lords*] shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office of their intention to suspend further proceedings not later than the day before the close of the present Session and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

Ordered,

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and shall be ordered to be read a second time;

Ordered,

That the Petition against the Bill presented in the present Session which stands referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

Ordered,

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the present Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph (*b*) of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

Ordered,

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)" were omitted;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—[*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Bangladesh

1. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What assistance her Department has provided to the people of Bangladesh to cope with the damage caused by the recent floods. [57800]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We are providing £22 million to assist with relief and rehabilitation to help Bangladesh recover from the floods. One million pounds was given very quickly to non-governmental organisations to help them to provide food, water, medicine and shelter for the most needy. Eleven million pounds is being used to provide food grains through the World Food Programme to help fill the gap in food supply over the coming months that will result from heavy losses of the monsoon rice crop. The remaining £10 million is being allocated to agricultural rehabilitation and restoration of livelihoods and infrastructure.

Mr. Borrow: I am sure that my right hon. Friend's announcement will be welcomed by the people of Bangladesh. On 29 November, I shall attend a fundraising event organised by the Bangladeshi community at the Koh-i-noor restaurant in Hutton in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend join me in praising the efforts of the Bangladeshi community in this country to raise funds to assist Bangladesh? That deserves real praise. Given that the difficulties in Bangladesh have arisen from natural disasters, which are always difficult to anticipate, and in view of the recent natural disasters that have struck central America, are there lessons for other parts of the world to be learnt from the way in which the Bangladeshi Government have handled their country's problems?

Clare Short: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in praising the people of the Bangladeshi community in Britain for their fundraising efforts throughout the country. As to the second part of his question, let me say that the way in which Bangladesh has coped with the floods is a model for the world of disaster-preparedness and self-reliance. Not only the Government, but the people of Bangladesh, have coped stunningly well. The contrast between Bangladesh and central America in loss of life resulting from comparable natural disasters shows the advantages of being prepared for disaster, and central America needs to get its systems in place. More than 60 per cent. of Bangladesh was devastated by the floods, and food crops and homes were lost. Bangladesh needs continuing help in order to reconstruct and go forward, so all the money raised by local groups in Britain will be extremely valuable.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): In view of the Government's welcome response to debt relief for Nicaragua and Honduras, does the Secretary of State intend to set a precedent for the faster relief of debt for all poor countries that have suffered natural disasters, which category must include Bangladesh since the floods there? Is she not concerned that the media hype about debt relief in central America might make people forget that the help that is most needed is money now for food, medicines and shelter?

Clare Short: I am grateful to the hon. Lady because that was my very point. In the immediate face of a disaster, when people are pulled out of the mud and their lives are saved, the great risks are cholera and hunger, and debt relief cannot cope with those. Debt relief is important for reconstruction, but the immediate task is to provide food and stop the spread of cholera. I have just read a UN report and I am pleased to say that we are making progress on that.

In the case of Bangladesh, the hon. Lady's point is well made. If the groups that campaign on debt pretend that debt relief is all that is needed to deal with catastrophes, Bangladesh will get nothing, which is inequitable. We must give appropriate support to poor countries that need it.

The third part of the hon. Lady's question was about whether we are trying to get flexibility for all highly indebted post-catastrophe countries. The answer is yes. I have spoken to Jim Wolfensohn and read the report of initial thinking in the World bank and the International Monetary Fund, and much effort is being made to try to achieve that flexibility.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I, too, am incredibly concerned about Bangladesh. Does my right hon. Friend's previous answer mean that it will be possible for Bangladesh to become eligible under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative so that the long-term effects of the devastation wrought by the floods can be resolved?

Clare Short: No. Bangladesh cannot qualify for HIPC because, fortunately, it is not a heavily indebted poor country. That is one burden that it does not have. It is not a good thing to be a heavily indebted poor country because it is difficult to get inward investment or borrowing for sensible projects. Bangladesh is a very poor country and has great need of support and help, and we are committed to continuing that. The World bank can provide fast-disbursing loans for emergencies, which we must ensure are well spent. Such work is going on.

Conflict Prevention

2. **Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): What steps her Department is taking to support conflict prevention and post–conflict reconstruction. [57801]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We aim to prevent conflict through long-term development programmes that bring benefits to all. We are also pursuing targeted strategies of conflict reduction such as improving the international machinery for dispute resolution and conflict prevention, combating small arms proliferation and other measures to limit the means of waging war.

In post-conflict countries—such as Rwanda, Liberia and, increasingly, we hope, other countries in Africa—we seek to promote sustainable peace through development

and demobilisation of troops, which includes their giving up their guns and getting a chance to work, and, where appropriate, security sector reform. We are also pressing the International Monetary Fund and the World bank more rapidly to bring post-conflict countries into the heavily indebted poor countries initiative.

Mr. McCabe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in post-conflict reconstruction, we should not offer aid or assistance to military regimes, wherever they may be, unless they give a clear commitment to democracy, economic reform and reform of their security services?

Clare Short: An interesting World bank report on that subject was published today. In general, the Government's policy is to set up our major programmes with Governments who are committed to poverty reduction. Progress in development is made when we back Governments who have their own reform programmes. People who are badly governed and living under dictatorial regimes are often some of the most oppressed and poorest in the world, and we do not turn our back on them. We can provide help by using non-governmental organisations and trying to build up civil society so that people can demand reform.

Long-term development requires a Government committed to development. Military regimes that oppress are not so committed. We are increasingly trying to help with demobilisation and security sector reform so that armies are responsible to the civil power and there are fewer chances of coups and destabilisation.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Has a World bank trust fund been established to give quickly disbursing grant funds to post-conflict countries and countries that have experienced a terrible natural disaster, such as Nicaragua and Honduras? Will the money be used to service outstanding international debt and will the £10 million that has been announced for Nicaragua and Honduras come from the Treasury reserve or the Department for International Development reserve?

Clare Short: We do not need a World bank trust fund for quickly disbursing disaster relief. The World bank has reorganised its resources in the region and made $200 million available in very quick disbursing loans to deal with the emergency. It does not need a trust fund; that can be done within the bank's existing organisation.

The purpose of the trust fund is to deal with debt. We would prefer all the creditors to agree to suspend repayments, but it is extremely unusual to obtain such agreement from the international financial institutions. Most of the debt is to the Inter-American Development bank. Failing such an agreement, the trust fund will help to pay off the costs of the debt while the countries concerned get reorganised. We have proffered money for that and Norway has agreed to join us. The World bank is examining that and other methods to ensure immediate relief on the payments.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Among the areas in need of post-conflict reconstruction are the areas controlled by the Palestine National Authority and the areas likely to be transferred to it under the Wye agreement. I know that the Under-Secretary has recently visited the region. Is the Department actively considering further action to help to construct a functioning economy and civil society in the Palestinian areas?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has just come back from a visit to the west bank and Gaza. I am sure that my hon. Friend shares our view that the slow pace in the peace process is disappointing, and that the growth of poverty and economic decline for the Palestinian people, when they are not allowed out to work in Israel, is extremely worrying. We are doing all that we can to strengthen the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and to help the Palestine National Authority to put in place systems that improve governance. We hope that matters will improve.

I am pleased to tell the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) that the extra money came from the Treasury; otherwise; poor people would be paying off the debt of other people.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the steps that the Department is taking to help in post-conflict situations. Has the Department any role in giving guidance to individuals who seek to play their own part in that, and who may often be misled? Money that is given to help people in a crisis may not reach its intended destination. I have in mind an issue that arose recently in connection with Iran Aid.

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that one of the terrible features of crises, internationally or at home, is that there are often people who raise money and then misuse it—they appeal to the generosity of others and spend the money improperly. We do not have a formal system to deal with that, but the disaster emergency committee in Britain groups together charities that are making appeals. It has now agreed that only NGOs working in the relevant country will receive the fruits of that appeal. That means that money should be safe, and I suggest that people give money through those organisations.

I cannot reply with authority to the hon. Gentleman's point about Iran Aid, as I am not familiar with the matter. If he will drop me a line, I shall look into it and get back to him.

Trade Negotiations

3. **Ms Tess Kingham** (Gloucester): What steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to assist the Governments of developing countries with their approaches to the World Trade Organisation in the run up to the next round of trade negotiations. [57802]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The Government are working with a wide range of organisations, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World bank and the Commonwealth secretariat, to help to build the capacity of developing countries to prepare for, and participate effectively in, future trade negotiations. It is important for the next trade round that there is agreement and that the developing countries have the capacity to represent their interests. We are helping in the analysis of key trade policy issues and in building policy and negotiating capacity in developing countries.

Ms Kingham: I am encouraged by that reply. Various NGOs, such as War on Want, and several

parliamentarians from the developing world have pointed out to me that there is no level playing field in the WTO negotiations. Large players such as the United States and the United Kingdom have ample resources—financial, personnel and research—whereas developing countries often do not. Because they cannot negotiate at the same level, they are disadvantaged.

Our leading player in the WTO negotiations is the Department of Trade and Industry. Have discussions taken place with the DTI or, if not, will my right hon. Friend consider them, to see whether we can build up the capacity of developing nations during the next round of talks?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. One of the enhanced capacities of my Department—since we became a separate Department—is trade, investment agreement and agricultural reform expertise. My hon. Friend will know that, although there is not a level playing field in the World Trade Organisation, the situation is a lot better than it used to be. It is now a rules-based organisation and the majority of its members are developing countries. If those countries have the capacity to analyse their interests and represent them, they can be a powerful force. That is why we are conducting the training to which I referred in my answer to my hon. Friend's main question.

We are also exploring with others the possibility of establishing a legal centre attached to the World Trade Organisation which would assist very poor countries in exerting their rights under that organisation. The EC is considering an alternative proposal. We have strong relationships with the Department of Trade and Industry, and are taking forward those matters in order to ensure that developing countries secure their rights in the international trading system.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Can the Secretary of State tell the House what she intends to do to try to help countries that have been affected by the hurricane, such as Honduras, to get their trade back into sensible order? I have written to the Minister about organisations that are working on the ground in Honduras, such as Casa Alianza, which could provide assistance to street children and others. Instead of workers and resources being rushed in, those organisations could receive money and help to rebuild that country following the terrible hurricane.

Clare Short: Honduras is a heavily indebted, poor country, but it had such a good trade performance that it did not qualify for HIPC funding. Sadly, it will now qualify for that assistance because of the deterioration in its economy. There are three phases of assistance. First, we must try to get people out of the mud and stop disease and hunger. Secondly, over a few months, we will start to provide temporary shelter. When things calm down, a mission will go from my Department to central America to offer assistance. Thirdly, there will be long-term reconstruction.

Before we came into the Chamber, the hon. Gentleman gave me some documents about the street children project with which he has been involved. I know that he does much work in that area. I shall consider what we know and what we can do to provide assistance.

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

4. **Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): What plans she has to support the work of the Liverpool school of tropical medicine in relation to international development. [57804]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): We encourage academic institutions to support the effort to eliminate global poverty by contributing to the achievement of international development goals and targets. The Liverpool school of tropical medicine, along with other United Kingdom and world-wide bodies, is a much valued partner in those efforts.

Mrs. Ellman: The Liverpool school of tropical medicine, which is a source of great pride to Liverpool, celebrates its centenary at the end of the week. Can the Minister assure me that he will continue to explore ways of ensuring that the school is able to use its great expertise to fight disease and poverty and to contribute to the development of societies throughout the world?

Mr. Foulkes: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Liverpool school of tropical medicine on its centenary. Not only is it well known in Liverpool and the United Kingdom but it has a worldwide reputation as a result of its work on elephantiasis, river blindness, HIV-AIDS and, particularly, malaria. A most distinguished former lecturer of the Liverpool school of tropical medicine, Dr. David Nabarro, is the head of the Department's health and population division. Sadly, he is to leave us. However, I am pleased to say that he is going to the World Health Organisation to head up the campaign to combat malaria. He will promote the name of the Liverpool school of tropical medicine far and wide.

Zimbabwe

5. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What plans she has to visit Zimbabwe to discuss aid projects in that country. [57805]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): The Secretary of State made a brief visit to Zimbabwe in January, but we have no immediate further plans to visit.

Mr. Pike: I assure my hon. Friend that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is welcome to visit Zimbabwe again to spend several days examining the problems facing that country. She will know that the Porta Farm project just outside Harare has shown what can be achieved with a small amount of money. Zimbabwe is trying to respond to its problems in a positive manner, and I hope that the Minister or the Secretary of State will find it possible to visit that country at an early date.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who led a very successful Commonwealth Parliamentary Association mission to Zimbabwe earlier this year.

He visited the Porta Farm project where £5,000 from the DFID small grants scheme has done much good work. We have many projects in water and sanitation, local government services, health and land reform in Zimbabwe. If the Secretary of State is not able to visit Zimbabwe again, I would be very happy to go.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): When the Minister finds time in his busy diary to visit Zimbabwe again, no doubt he will be checking on the millions of pounds worth of aid that we provide to that country. What assurances can the hon. Gentleman give the House that he is not in the business of underwriting a deeply undemocratic and corrupt Government who are currently engaged in increasingly aggressive military operations in the Congo to prop up the Kabila regime, and who threaten now to engulf Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda in a continentwide conflict? Further, will the Minister tell the House whether he thinks that such assurances are irrelevant or essential?

Mr. Foulkes: We are working hard for peace in the Congo. We have made that clear in our Department as well as through the Foreign Office. We are reassessing our programme. I can tell the hon. Lady that we have made it absolutely clear that we are willing to support land reform as long as it is transparent, properly managed and cost effective, that there is a poverty focus and that it includes all stakeholders. We are concerned about the extent and impact of Zimbabwe's involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have made it clear that we can establish long-term partnerships only with countries that are committed to the elimination of poverty and which develop appropriate economic, social and environmental policies. This includes partner countries not diverting limited resources into excessive military expenditure.

Know-how Fund

6. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): How many projects are being supported by the know-how fund; and if she will make a statement. [57806]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): The know-how fund is supporting 573 projects.

The aim of the fund is to support the former communist countries in their transition to pluralist democracies and well-regulated market economies in a way that benefits all levels of society, particularly the poorest.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that reply. The Minister will know that Slovenia and Estonia are two states that are currently aspiring to European Union membership. Both states have great problems. Slovenia has economic problems and Estonia has very serious environmental problems. Is it not therefore unfortunate that there is to be a reduction in the total amount of know-how fund expenditure in the Baltic states?

Mr. Foulkes: As well as know-how fund expenditure, we contribute a huge amount towards EU expenditure in those pre-accession countries through the Poland and Hungary aid for reconstruction of the economy programme, so there is a great deal of British money going in that relates to accession. Through our bilateral programme, we do not support accession per se but we support projects, including environmental ones, which help those states graduate towards accession. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we take account of that. If he has any particular suggestions that he would like us to consider, I would be happy to meet him to discuss them.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Many know-how fund projects will depend on volunteers. Is the Minister aware that Voluntary Service Overseas is now, for the first time in nearly 30 years, recruiting school leavers for some of its projects? On behalf of all gap-year organisations, for which I know the hon. Gentleman has a great deal of respect, will his Department consider funding such organisations and recognise at last that school leavers on longer-term projects, with the right structure and training, can aid the countries that they visit as well as aiding their own development?

Mr. Foulkes: More years ago than I care to remember, I used to run the Scottish Union of Students overseas volunteer programme, which was very successful. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who has moved round the country from East Lothian to South Edinburgh and who now resides in Devizes, knows very well what I did. I say honestly that I was not aware that the VSO had moved back to taking school leavers. We have been supporting substantially its programme for volunteers, with each volunteer costing about £12,500. We have been giving significant support. If the VSO is supporting school leavers, we would certainly consider any request that it made for additional support.

Kosovo

7. **Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What assistance has been given by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the European Union to the people made homeless in Kosovo in recent months. [57807]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is taking the lead in co-ordinating humanitarian assistance in Kosovo. We have provided £3 million in emergency assistance since March and the EC some £6.5 million. Those and other contributions should meet immediate needs; at the moment, the UNHCR does have enough money. We are in close touch with it and with other agencies and will shortly send a mission from my Department to review the position and to assess future needs.

Dr. Godman: I welcome my right hon. Friend's contribution, but I hope that the recalcitrance of certain elements of the Kosovo Liberation Army will not deter the European Union from providing the substantial funds that are needed for a major house-building programme. Should not the KLA be urged to play the long game in relation to its aspirations for independence to help with the rebuilding of the infrastructure?

Clare Short: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. First, I assure him that the resources will be provided, so that people can rebuild their houses and go home; of course, the monitors are necessary to give them the

security to feel safe when they go home. Secondly, we all understand the proper sense of grievance that people in Kosovo have, but fighting to establish an independent state will not help them. It is much better to proceed with the support of the international community and democratically.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Secretary of State will probably be aware—because her officials helpfully provided briefing for me—that I spent five days last week in Kosovo I saw at first hand the terrible plight of some of the 200,000 displaced people and some of their 20,000 destroyed homes. She will already know that many of them are living in unspeakable conditions and winter is arriving. Does she agree that the aid agencies are doing an excellent job in trying to meet the immediate short-term problems of food, shelter and medicine, but that their life would be made a lot easier if some of the payments from ECHO—the European Community Humanitarian Office—could be speeded up? Many of them talked of a logjam in the system.

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that her Department is committed to the region in the longer term and, in particular, will she set out her thoughts on support for health care and education in the longer term? Does she agree that this is, after all, a country in Europe and, as is so often the case, it is when the shooting stops that the problems begin?

Clare Short: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that the needs are great. I think that we are pretty well organised—non-governmental organisations led by the UNHCR are working. We are a bit worried that too many organisations are going in. It is better if we have more organisations specialising. I agree with him that we must get people home and get proper housing constructed for them, so that they can survive the winter.

On ECHO, it is true that the disbursement of all EC funds is disappointingly slow. There is a need for great increases in efficiency in the whole development sector and we are working hard to try to achieve that.

In terms of long-term support, we hope that, if we can achieve peace and respect for human rights in Kosovo, as in the whole of the Balkans, the normal investment that would come from the World bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and so on could quickly reconstruct these economies. They are basically educated people with plenty of resources. It is all the war and conflict that is causing so much damage.

Natural Disasters

8. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): What assistance her Department has given in 1998 to countries suffering from natural disasters. [57808]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): During 1998, the Department for International Development has responded to an unprecedented number of natural disasters, including floods in east Africa, China, Bangladesh, India, a tidal wave in Papua New Guinea and hurricanes in central America and the Caribbean; when we are through the present crisis, we have to look at whether environmental causes were behind the phenomenon. In addition, my Department has continuing commitments to natural disasters from previous years such as that in Montserrat. The assistance provided to date in 1998 totals £47,220,940.

Mr. Evans: Does the Secretary of State think that the amount of money that she has at her disposal for international disasters is sufficient to meet the needs of those particular countries? Does she agree that what is important is not only the amount of financial assistance that is given to the countries, but the speed with which the money gets through? It strikes me that the assistance that has been given to Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala is not only too little, but has come very late to help them to minimise the casualties that they now face.

Clare Short: First, on the question whether the Department has sufficient resources for disasters, the answer is yes. We programme a certain amount of money for disasters of all sorts, including those arising from war, but, by definition, they are unpredictable. The Department has the capacity to reprogramme and find more resources if there is a high and disproportionate number of natural disasters. We have sufficient funding, so that is no problem.

I agree that speed is essential. My conflict and emergency department is famous throughout the world for being one of the speediest. It is no good simply appearing on television and pledging money—we have to produce food and help on the ground quickly. We were lucky that HMS Sheffield was in the area so that we could help. We managed to get food and medical supplies to the area very quickly. The hon. Gentleman is right in what he says, but we are responding. There has not been a terrible delay and things are getting better in central America.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [57830] **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 11 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Earlier today, together with you, Madam Speaker, right hon. and hon. Members and millions of people across the country, I observed a two-minute silence to commemorate the sacrifices made by so many on behalf of us all. Later today, in addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

Mr. Chope: Is it not heartening that so many people participated in the two-minute silence this morning? As we are remembering those who gave their lives so that we could have our freedom, will the Prime Minister tell us why, in March this year, his Government decided to reject a grant application by St. Dunstan's, the charity which

looks after service men blinded in the service of their country, apparently on the ground of insufficient priority? Will he today announce that he will reverse that decision?

The Prime Minister: No; we have actually done a great deal for such organisations.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is heartening that so many people observed the two-minute silence, which should be an event that unites the whole of this House and the country.

Miss Melanie Johnson (Welwyn Hatfield): In view of the grave news today about the withdrawal of United Nations arms inspectors from Iraq—a further sign, if one were needed, of Saddam Hussein's willingness to flout international law—will my right hon. Friend tell us what steps the Government will be taking to deal with the rapidly deteriorating situation in Iraq?

The Prime Minister: Saddam Hussein is in breach of not only the UN resolutions but the agreement that he made with Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General. His disagreement is with the whole world community. It is not a technical breach of the agreement—it is a substantial breach because it is clear from the evidence that, if unchecked, he will try to develop weapons of mass destruction. The evidence uncovered recently by French and Swiss officials of the attempt to decontaminate warheads is further proof of that. He may think that the international community lacks the will to act, but, if so, he is seriously and profoundly wrong. We will act if he does not immediately come back into compliance with the UN resolutions and abide by the agreement that he made.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): The Opposition support the Prime Minister's remarks.

In the European elections next year, should not people be able to vote for the candidate of their choice, rather than for a party list that leaves them no such choice—and that, with the highly unusual exception of the Northern Ireland peace negotiations, has never been used in our country?

The Prime Minister: No, because the system we are proposing is far simpler. The election will cover all regions and there could be up to 50 names on a ballot paper and no individual constituencies, so I believe that our system is the best for those elections.

Mr. Hague: Is not the reason that the Prime Minister wants that system the fact that closed lists give power to party stooges? Is he aware that local people in the midlands complained that one of the Labour candidates imposed on them knew nothing of their area? The *Birmingham Post* reported Labour bosses as saying that he did know something about the area because he had

"acted in the Rocky Horror Show at Birmingham Rep earlier this year . . . and directed Kiss of the Spider Woman at the New Vic in Newcastle-Under-Lyme."

Is not the truth that the Prime Minister wants a system that eliminates any kind of independent thinking? Is he not undermining the democratic traditions of this country for his own party purposes?

The Prime Minister: No. That is absolute nonsense. The difference is simply that, on the list that the right hon. Gentleman is proposing, people would be prevented from voting for the party alone. When we are electing people on the basis of regions, with very large numbers of people, the system that we are proposing is a far better and more simple one, which has been used extensively elsewhere. As he admitted in his initial question, the system was pioneered in Northern Ireland by the previous Government. As the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), said:

"I believe that this is a fair and balanced system that will produce a representative outcome."

So, thank you for the suggestion.

Mr. Hague: If the Prime Minister reads on a sentence in the statement of my right hon. Friend he will see that he said:

"I have to say that there is no precedent that I know for the circumstances and complexities that exist in Northern Ireland."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 498-501.]

That is how he justified the system. Why does the Prime Minister not give the full quote?

The Prime Minister is now trying to prevent one of his Welsh Members of Parliament from leading the Labour party in Wales, trying to prevent one of his Scottish Members of Parliament from even standing for the Scottish Parliament and trying to prevent one of his London Members of Parliament from being a candidate for mayor of London. So, to make vetoing people easier in future, the Prime Minister wants a system for the European Parliament that gives power to party officials and not to the voter. Is that not putting party before country?

The Prime Minister: No, it is not. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary pointed out in yesterday's debate, under the system that the right hon. Gentleman is recommending, perversely, someone could get elected with fewer votes than other people on the list. The system that we are proposing is therefore a far better one. It is also used widely elsewhere. As for all the right hon. Gentleman's other pre-prepared words on the Labour party, I very gently tell him that, when I want his suggestions on party management, I will drop him a note.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will the Prime Minister congratulate Chorley and South Ribble, and Preston hospital trusts on the way in which they have brought together clinical services to ensure that patients come first, and the way in which the two trusts will continue to operate for the benefit of those constituencies?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I will congratulate them. I will also point out, as I am sure that my hon. Friend would want me to, that the extra £21 billion that will go next year into the health service—today we have had official confirmation that the Conservatives are opposed to that investment—will provide a better service for my hon. Friend's constituents and allow those two trusts to go from strength to strength.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Has the Prime Minister seen the recent report showing that up to 27 million pensioners in Britain could be in severe financial hardship in retirement because of the underfunding of pensions? Is there not only one sensible way of solving the problem in

a practical manner—by introducing compulsory second-tier or stakeholder pensions? Next week, that will be proposed by the former Minister for Welfare Reform, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). Will the Prime Minister and the Government support him?

The Prime Minister: We said that we will publish our paper on pensions reform in due course. I shall not comment on those findings until they are published. Of course we understand that pensions need full-scale reform, which is exactly why we are examining the issue. However, we have to ensure that reform is right for all categories of pensioner.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister says that the Government are undecided, but would not "confused" be a better adjective? Last week, the *Financial Times* was briefed to say that the Government would drop compulsory pensions. Yesterday, *The Scotsman* was told that they would back compulsory pensions. Which is right? If he cannot give us a date on which he will be able to tell us that, will he please at least tell us when the result will be published?

The Prime Minister: As I have already said, as we will publish our proposals, I should not tell the right hon. Gentleman what they are now. However, we can discuss the proposals as soon as they are published. I should tell him that, since the Government came to power, we have not only cut VAT on fuel to help pensioners but given them a special winter bonus. We have also introduced for the first time a guaranteed minimum income for pensioners. All those measures are worth while for pensioners, but I agree that we have to reform the system fundamentally. We are taking on an issue that was ducked by the previous Government for 18 years.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the recent action of President Clinton, who fired one of his political allies into space? Does that course of action commend itself to my right hon. Friend and would he be willing to discuss it with the Liberals when they next meet?

The Prime Minister: As I was just saying to the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, there are extensive consultations on that and I will get back to him in due course.

Q2. [57831] **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): Does the Prime Minister recall that, back in July, I asked him how he would meet the three-year spending plans that had just been introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Does he recall that he answered me by saying, "Unemployment bad, new deal good. It is simple. Geddit?" On the day that the Bank of England has said that the Chancellor's growth forecasts are hopelessly unrealistic, on the day that unemployment has again gone up and on the day that VAT receipts to the Treasury are going down, does the Prime Minister not think that his reaction back in July was just a tad optimistic and complacent?

The Prime Minister: First, I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman reminded me of my answer to him in July as the question and the answer had slipped my mind temporarily. As he will know from today's figures, over the past three months employment has risen by 124,000. Since the election, 400,000 new jobs have been created, with 237,000 new vacancies in the past few months. There are 160,000 young people on the new deal, with 30,000 already in jobs. I can tell him today, and I hope that he will congratulate us on it, that youth unemployment—young people unemployed for more than six months—is now at its lowest level since the mid-1970s. That is a record of which any Government would be proud, but I take it from what the hon. Gentleman said about spending that he, too, is opposed to our spending plans for next year. I believe that that spending is right. It is the correct investment for the country, it is right for economic management, and I hope that one of these days the hon. Gentleman and those on the Opposition Front Bench will come round to seeing that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Prime Minister has been misinformed. Is it not a matter of record that the French and Swiss tests to which he referred proved negative? It is true that the first American test proved positive, but the second American test proved negative and that result was suppressed. Can he give the name of any Arab country—just one will do—which now supports military action against Iraq in the next month?

The Prime Minister: I know that my hon. Friend has just come back from Iraq and I understand his strong feelings on it, but the French and the Swiss found clear evidence that warheads had been decontaminated from weapons of mass destruction. On the evidence that we have compiled on Saddam Hussein, going back over a period of years, it is clear that he has attempted to develop weapons of mass destruction. After all, that is why he wants the inspectors out—so that we do not know about the weapons of mass destruction that he is developing. He is the only leader that I know of anywhere in the world who has used weapons of mass destruction—5,000 people, mainly women and children, died as a result of his use of such weapons.

Saddam Hussein made an agreement at the conclusion of the Gulf war and then made a further agreement with the UN Secretary-General. All we are saying is that he should abide by that agreement. That is not an unreasonable position. The quarrel that he has is with the whole of the international community and if we allow him to get away with a substantial breach of the agreement and to develop weapons of mass destruction, we will pay a very heavy price in the future.

Q3. [57832] **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will make an official visit to Newhaven.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Baker: I am sorry to hear that, given the serious situation facing Newhaven, with the possible demise of the ferry after 173 years of running between Newhaven and Dieppe. Is the Prime Minister aware that one of the most famous people alleged to have used the ferry is Lord Lucan, when he was fleeing the country? What steps will the Prime Minister take to ensure that the ferry does not disappear as Lord Lucan did?

The Prime Minister: I did not catch the end of that question, but I assume that the hon. Gentleman was not

asking me to search for Lord Lucan. The hon. Gentleman met the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) this week. He has been campaigning hard on the issue, as have some Labour Members. We recognise the importance of Newhaven as a port, but we have limited powers to influence commercial decisions by P and O Stena on operational and investment matters. However, we have put in place measures under the capital challenge scheme, under the single regeneration budget and in respect of European Interreg funding that have put millions of pounds into Newhaven. We know that the situation is serious, but there are limits to how far we can intervene in a commercial decision. I know that the hon. Gentleman will carry on fighting the case for his constituents. We shall do what we can within the constraints of government, but we cannot interfere with the decision that the company has made.

Q4. [57833] **Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): Why is the Prime Minister afraid of giving the electorate the opportunity of voting for an individual candidate in the European elections?

The Prime Minister: I should like to add to what I have already said on that to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). The choice is between the system that the hon. Lady is proposing—which would prevent people from voting for a party alone, even though the majority of people will not know the merits of the individual members—and our system, which is simpler and better. It is used extensively abroad. People have the choice to vote for the political party that they want. I believe that that is a far better way to go.

Q5. [57834] **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): Is my right hon. Friend aware that more than 1.5 million people in the United Kingdom suffer from diabetes, which is the main cause of blindness in those under 65? The national health service spends more than £2 billion per year on treating the effects of diabetes. Will my right hon. Friend look into the case for having a targeted, selective screening programme for diabetes so that we can deal more efficiently in future with a disease that kills, maims and blinds?

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done campaigning on the issue in the House and outside. Decisions on the introduction of a national screening programme will be made in the light of the report from the national screening committee, due early next year. We shall continue to work with the British Diabetic Association and others to improve care. The Department of Health has commissioned guidelines for clinicians about the most effective treatment of diabetes. The extra investment that we are putting into the national health service next year will improve services for all, including those with diabetes.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): The Bank of England inflation report, published today, says that the working time directive will add to inflation. Does the Prime Minister agree with the Bank?

The Prime Minister: Actually, the Bank of England says that, although there may be some marginal effect as a result of the working time directive, we are going to meet the central projections for inflation and its growth forecasts are in line with those that we have put forward, to which the right hon. Gentleman has objected.

Mr. Hague: So, the Prime Minister agrees that the working time directive will increase inflation. Everyone knows that it will add to inflation and therefore to interest rates. Everyone knows that it will also add to unemployment. With the jobless total up by 7,000 today, is it not the worst possible time to add extra regulation and bureaucracy to the burdens that businesses now have to bear?

The Prime Minister: No. Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman that the working time directive was introduced by the European Union under the previous Government and would have had to be implemented by any Government—no matter who was in power. He may disagree, but I believe that the fact that employees, for the first time, will get four weeks minimum holiday entitlement is a good thing, not a bad thing.

The Bank says:

"it is not sufficient to warrant changing the central projection for . . . inflation two years ahead."

The right hon. Gentleman did not mention that it also said:

"Measures such as the New Deal and the Working Families Tax Credit are designed to increase the supply of labour, and could lower the natural rate of unemployment."

Mr. Hague: It also says that the directive will cause an upward skew in inflation. If the best argument that the Prime Minister has for the working time directive is to pretend that the Conservative party was in favour of it, he is pretty short of arguments on the subject. Are not today's unemployment figures yet another sign of a downturn made in Downing street? Businesses are facing a flood of new regulations and bureaucracy. When will Ministers understand that red tape strangles businesses and jobs?

The Prime Minister: It is typical of the right hon. Gentleman that his response is to abandon the minimum wage and to get rid of minimum holiday entitlement, as he wants to do. Apparently, he also opposes the family-friendly policy of unpaid parental leave, and he wants to cancel the new deal and the working families tax credit.

It is important to get the situation in balance. Since the election, 400,000 more jobs have been created, and more than 237,000 new vacancies. Long-term and youth unemployment are down, and unemployment is down since the election. The question is, given the difficulties for jobs and industry over the next year, what is the right policy? We say that new fiscal and monetary rules and Bank of England independence are right. The right hon. Gentleman is opposed to those. We say investment in skills and education is right, including the biggest boost to education ever. He has set himself opposed to that and described it as a "spending spree" in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*. I assume that means that he is against it. Is he against it?

The third element is the new deal and the working families tax credit. The right hon. Gentleman has now said that he is against those. Let me remind him that the

working families tax credit will make 1.5 million families £17 a week better off on average. Just so his Back Benchers understand it—everyone knows what a bold leader he is—they will all go into the next election saying that those 1.5 million people who are, on average, £17 better off will lose that money. Well, roll on that day.

Hon. Members: More, more.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): On a day when we rightly pay tribute to the generation who lived through the first world war and the many who died in it, will the Prime Minister resist the temptation to be distracted by the Liberal Democrats and address a different starting point? Surely if there is an act of remembrance that the country owes to the generation of today's pensioners, it is to do the one thing that the Tories in government steadfastly refused to do—to restore the value of the state pension and its link with earnings.

The Prime Minister: We have given our reasons, on many occasions, why we cannot commit ourselves to that. The reason is that the cost would be substantial, and the money would not be spread among those pensioners who need it most. We have made it clear that the crucial thing is to get help, first of all, to the poorest pensioners. That is the reason for the £50 winter bonus for those on income support and the minimum pension guarantee. I believe that the substantial extra investment of £2.5 billion over the next three years—opposed by the Tories, so we will take no lessons from them—which will get money to those who need it most, is the right thing to do. I think that most pensioners will understand that.

Q6. [57835] **Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): The chief constable of my area claims that, in 1999–2000, he will suffer a budget cut of £6 million, which is the equivalent of 300 officers in Devon and Cornwall. The Government claim that funding is adequate. Who is telling the truth about the budget for the Devon and Cornwall police for that year?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been helpfully reminding me, we are putting £1.24 billion extra into the police and the budget allocations have not yet been decided. If I have any news for the hon. Gentleman, I will write to him.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my right hon. Friend recall the court decision at the beginning of this year, which stated that thousands of miners, ex-miners and their widows would receive settlements under the legislation on chronic bronchitis and emphysema? After all this time, those benefits have not yet been paid. Way back in the 1970s, under a previous Labour Government, we had a scheme to deal with pneumoconiosis and, later, asbestosis. We managed to find a way out of the problem by ensuring a sliding scale of payments, initiated through the Government.

We are having trouble getting the matter resolved. It is true that some lawyers are causing a little antagonism, but in view of the fact that my right hon. Friend can knock a few heads together and as we are meeting the Minister for Energy and Industry in a few minutes' time to try to resolve the matter, will he ensure that he gives us a chuck-on?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend could teach everyone one a thing or two about lobbying. I understand that we are trying to make early payments up front and I will look into the situation. I cannot commit myself to what he suggests, but we will do our best and I am sure that he will put all those points to the Minister when he meets him shortly.

Q7. [57836] **Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro and St. Austell): The Prime Minister will probably be aware that, next year, Cornwall and parts of Devon will see the first total eclipse in this country since 1926. Bearing in mind that the 1926 eclipse caused the largest mass movement of people by train in history and the fact that it is predicted that millions of people will try to visit a peninsula that suffers from infrastructure difficulties, the police, ambulance and fire services are expecting to have to pay out millions of pounds in extra costs. That will hit local services. So far, the Home Office has said that the problem is purely local. Surely the eclipse is a genuinely national event that needs national support. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask his colleagues to look into the financial costs that are about to fall on us?

The Prime Minister: I thought for a moment that we were going to get a Liberal Democrat on his feet without asking for more money, but we were disappointed. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that a large number of people will go to the area to see the total eclipse of the sun. I am sure that that will impose additional costs and burdens, but there is a formula for dealing with such matters. *[Interruption.]* Yes, there is and it will be applied in the hon. Gentleman's case as it would be in everyone else's. No matter how much the Liberal Democrats may want me to do so, I will not write blank cheques at the Dispatch Box.

Q8. [57837] **Mr. Clive Efford** (Eltham): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the concern that exists about the World Trade Organisation's interpretation of article 20, which allows countries to prevent products that harm human, animal or plant life from being imported? Is he aware that a European Union ban on the sale of meat products derived from animals on which hormones have been used to accelerate growth was overturned by the WTO because it violated world trade agreements?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that such rulings prevent organisations such as the EU from protecting people on environmental and health grounds? At the World Trade Organisation negotiations next year, will he argue for greater priority to be given to those issues?

The Prime Minister: As I said at the 50th anniversary of the world trading system in Geneva in May, in general terms we believe in, and support, trade liberalisation, but it is important that we do not do so at any cost and that we consider the environmental impact of any proposals. The case that my hon. Friend raises is already before the WTO and was the subject of an Adjournment debate last week.

We have already made it clear that we support the European Commission's proposal for a high-level meeting on trade and the environment to thrash out those issues.

However, there is more than one response to the problem that he mentions and to the WTO ruling, and we must proceed very carefully before we give a definitive view.

Q9. [57838] **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): Was not the Prime Minister's reply to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) on the working time directive gratuitously superficial? Is it not the case that the increase in unemployment in this country has two causes—the extra burden of regulation and taxation, which amounts to some £39 billion, and the impost that we pay to the European Union, which is a net contribution of £2 billion? Moreover, the European Union's financial perspective is that its expenditure should grow by 19 per cent. The British worker is being hammered at home and milked abroad.

The Prime Minister: I saw that the hon. Gentleman received warm support for his question from Conservative Members, but I certainly did not mean to be gratuitous in my response to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). I do not believe that the working time directive—which will give people the right, for the first time, to four weeks holiday entitlement—is an unnecessary burden on business. It is extraordinary, but entirely typical, that the Conservative party should believe that the way forward is to cancel any basic minimum standards that people have in the workplace.

On the money that we pay to the European Union, the hon. Gentleman has a perfectly honourable position—he opposes the European Union. That is not the Government's view. We believe that we gain enormously by being members of the European Union. We gain in trade—

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): You are Europe's poodle.

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether that was the Conservative party's third view. We gain enormously in trade, jobs and industry from our membership of the European Union. The best thing for us to do in the difficult time ahead—

Mr. Hayes: You're just Europe's poodle.

Madam Speaker: Order. I will not have the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) standing there shouting, something that has gone on throughout Question Time. I caution him that, if it happens next week, he will be sent out during questions. The same applies to all hon. Members. If hon. Members want to participate, they must take their seats.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman can go and join Mr. Portillo.

The way in which to deal with jobs and business over the next year is as I have described. The choice is simple: what is the best way in which to steer a course of stability in the year ahead? We repeat that the best way is to make the investments that we have made, to tackle the problems of social exclusion as we are doing and to hold firm to Bank of England independence. I believe that that position is supported by the vast majority of people in this country, who do not want a return either to underfunded public services or to the boom and bust of the Conservatives.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will no doubt have seen the story in *The Times* today. I seek your guidance on whether it is in order for me to indulge in idle chatter on social occasions in the House with my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), who is a member of the Territorial Army.

Madam Speaker: I have not seen any comment in *The Times*. I, for one in the House, do not comment on newspaper reports, and that is a very wise stand to take.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) raises a matter that is of concern to a number of hon. Members, of whom I am one. According to fully verified reports, a circular has been issued to members of the Territorial Army saying that they must not, on pain of court martial, speak to Members of Parliament or to others about the changes to the TA that the Government are proposing. I am about to participate in Exercise Red Javelin, and I want to know whether I can speak to the paras.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman who is rising should say nothing. I understand that I have already received a letter from him on this matter, which concerns privilege, and I must deal with it on that basis.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I would welcome your guidance. On 21 October, I made a speech, at column 1199, relating to the steel industry in my constituency. I have with me a petition from Co-Steel Sheerness plc, which misrepresents my position, and I seek your guidance, with particular reference to "Erskine May", which says:

"On 22 April 1699 the Commons resolved, 'That the publishing the names of Members of this House and reflecting upon them, and misrepresenting their proceedings in Parliament, is a breach of the privilege of this House, and destructive of the freedom of Parliament'."

Will you advise me on whether it is a matter of privilege?

Madam Speaker: Let me give some guidance to the hon. Gentleman, who is relatively new to the House. It may well be a matter of privilege and, if he will write to me, I will consider it on that basis.

Registration of Nannies

3.35 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to extend local authority registers under the Children Act 1989 to cover nannies who look after children on domestic premises.

I want to raise an issue of profound importance to many—indeed, perhaps most—hon. Members: child care. The hours in which the House operates mean that, like many hon. Members, I am constrained in the amount of time that I can spend with my children and I am dependent on good-quality and reliable child care. Every working parent has a right to reliable child care, and that is why I feel that it is imperative that existing legislation be extended to cover not only child minders but nannies and au pairs who look after children in the child's home.

The nanny profession is growing rapidly as the number of families with both parents working increases. A recent estimate puts the number of nannies at 100,000, and a survey has concluded that 60 per cent. of women who have an A-level or higher qualification choose to employ a nanny when they return to work after maternity leave. Nannies are no longer the preserve of an elite few in Britain but are a widespread phenomenon. Indeed, they are central to the whole issue of child care.

I welcome the Government's development of a national child care strategy and pay tribute to the role played by my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Social Security. I especially welcome the consultation exercise launched earlier this year, which is due to report at the end of the year.

In the past two weeks, the Government have made some excellent announcements on the family, women and children, furthering the social policy agenda, but I believe that the idea of a child care strategy, and indeed of a policy framework that encourages women to return to work, is incomplete unless provision is made for the universal registration and regulation of all child carers, including nannies.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard), who raised this topic in an Adjournment debate and whose early-day motion gained 176 signatures from hon. Members of all parties. I acknowledge the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan) and for Stafford (Mr. Kidney). I want to single out the efforts of organisations such as Playpen, the Pre-school Learning Alliance and the Institute of Childcare and Social Education, all of which have campaigned for a register and made numerous representations in the consultation exercise.

The principal reason for a register is that there is no system for checking the suitability and history of nannies and au pairs. We do not, unfortunately, live in a world where characters like Mary Poppins can appear, as if by magic, with qualities perfectly attuned to the demands of the children under their care.

All the checks must be done by parents themselves, and even then there is no way of checking police records on potential carers. There are no mechanisms for nannies to be regularly inspected at work, to ensure that they are carrying out their duties properly. The onus is completely

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

on the parent and, although that is good for parental choice, parents receive no support in making their choice; nor is there any safeguard against a mistake or oversight by a parent.

The lack of regulation also has implications for the tax credit system. Because nannies are not registered, their employers cannot claim child care tax credit, as do mothers who use other forms of child care. Again, a valuable part of the Government's social policy is undermined by the lack of registration.

It is not just parents and children who stand to gain from registration. The current system provides no safeguards to protect nannies from exploitation or mistreatment by their employers. A properly regulated system would ameliorate the situation.

The necessity for greater regulation has been made clear to all by the recent high-profile cases of harm coming to children while under the care of an unqualified carer. Louise Woodward had no qualifications to be a child carer. Whatever the dispute over the verdict in her case—and her constituency Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), still proclaims her innocence, as she does—the result was that a baby died while in her care and she was convicted. The Australian au pair, Louise Sullivan, is awaiting trial for murder of a baby who died while in her care. If they wished to, both Louise Woodward and Louise Sullivan could start work immediately as nannies in this country. Astonishing as that may sound, there is nothing to stop them doing so.

However, the problem is not confined to high-profile cases. Those of us who need nannies in our homes know the problems. My wife and I have advertised for nannies, interviewed them and taken up references. As with other jobs, the written references—what employers are prepared to put in writing—are completely different from what they are prepared to say verbally. The difference in the case of nannies is that employees are given responsibility for that which is most precious to parents.

Voluntary or private registers, although of benefit in providing some security, cannot be seen as the whole solution. The cost to parents of using such registers, and to nannies of entering themselves, can be preclusive. More importantly, there is no mechanism for such registers to be supervised by the Government or social services or to stop agencies simply operating as a profiteering database containing the names and addresses of nannies. Any sense of security gained from such registers may be false.

The minefield of private and voluntary registers is demonstrated by the experience of the Worldwide Nanny Register. It set up a nanny register with various back-up and support services for nannies and parents on a not-for-profit basis. However, it was forced to cease its operations because there was no compulsion on nannies to join and the register could not survive. The answer must be a properly supervised and publicly run register. The aim of everyone in the campaign is for a national register, managed and supervised by the Government. However, the creation of a national register may take some years and much finance to set up. In the meantime, a simple legislative measure is all that is needed to create registers at local level.

Part X of the Children's Act 1989 requires local authorities to keep registers of child minders and those who provide day care for children, which are open to consultation by the public, and empowers local authorities to make regular inspections of child carers at work. To get on to a register, a child minder must have two personal references, a medical reference, two social work inquiry checks and a police check. However, the Act specifically states that those employed by parents as nannies do not count as child minders and are not covered by the Act. My Bill would strike out the legislative exemption for nannies and extend the Act to cover them.

Last week, I joined other hon. Members and members of the Playpen Campaign in a meeting Baroness Jay, the new Minister for Women. She assured us that she sees quality child care as an issue of crucial importance. I feel confident that the question of regulation will be looked into when the consultation exercise comes to an end. As we were meeting my noble Friend, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health was making a statement in the House outlining the Government's plans for a national register of people considered unsuitable to work with children. That is another positive step forward and a register for nannies would surely be only one small stage further.

Thank you again, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to raise this important issue. I conclude by quoting Tricia Pritchard, chair of the Playpen Campaign, who says:

"There needs to be greater regulation of nanny agencies, including police checks and a requirement for a minimum standard of relevant qualifications, to make sure that parents can have peace of mind about their children's safety."

We all know how important it is to avoid bureaucratic over-regulation, but there is a crucial balance to be struck between regulation and safety. It is clear that, if security for parents and children and, indeed, nannies and au pairs, is to be guaranteed, the only possible course of action is to set up a national register.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Keith Vaz, Mr. David Taylor, Mr. Martin Salter, Jackie Ballard, Mrs. Helen Brinton, Ms Ruth Kelly, Caroline Flint, Ms Julie Morgan, Jenny Jones, Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mr. David Kidney, Mrs. Anne Campbell.

REGISTRATION OF NANNIES

Mr. Keith Vaz accordingly presented a Bill to extend local authority registers under the Children Act 1989 to cover nannies who look after children on domestic premises: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Thursday 12 November, and to be printed [Bill 258].

SCOTLAND BILL (PROGRAMME)

Ordered,

That the Order [13th January] relating to the Scotland Bill (Programme) be supplemented as follows—

Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed in two allotted days and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion three and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the second allotted day.

2.—(1) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order, namely: Nos. 215 to 220, 1 to 87, 125 to 129, 237 to 278, 88 to 124, 130 to 214, 221 to 236 and 279 to 302.

(2) The two allotted days shall be allotted in the manner shown in the Table set out below.

(3) Each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the expiry of the period (calculated from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill) specified in the second column of the Table.

TABLE

Allotted day	*Lords Amendments*	*Allotted period*
First day	Nos. 215 to 220 and 1	1 hour 30 minutes
	Nos. 2 to 22	2 hours
	Nos. 23 to 52	3 hours 30 minutes
	Nos. 53 to 87	4 hours
	Nos. 125 to 129	5 hours 30 minutes
	Nos. 237 to 278	6 hours 30 minutes
Second day	Nos. 88 to 124, 130 to 214, 221 to 236 and 279 to 302	3 hours 30 minutes

3.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraphs 1 and 2.

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question already proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment the Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any further amendment to the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(4) The Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to the Speaker to involve questions of Privilege.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown, to a Lords Amendment, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment.

(7) The Speaker shall then put forthwith with respect to the Lords Amendments designated by the Speaker which have not been disposed of the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in those Amendments.

(8) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(9) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, or disposed of an Amendment relevant to a Lords Amendment which has been disagreed to, the Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment which is moved by a Minister of the Crown and relevant to the Lords Amendment.

(10) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

(11) Proceedings under this paragraph shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Supplemental

4. A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

5. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on Consideration of the Lords Amendments—

(a) on the first allotted day, for any part of the period of six and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill which falls after Ten o'clock, and

(b) on the second allotted day, for any part of the period of three and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill which falls after Ten o'clock.

Proceedings on the Motion, if not previously concluded, will be brought to a conclusion 45 minutes after their commencement (Order of 13th January).—[Mr. Allen.]

Orders of the Day

Scotland Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

Lords amendments considered.

Schedule 1

CONSTITUENCIES, REGIONS AND REGIONAL MEMBERS

Lords amendment: No. 215, in page 57, line 5, after ("constituencies") insert ("of the Scottish Parliament")

3.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 216 to 220.

Mr. Dewar: Today, we continue a long saga that has become part of our lives over the past year or so. I offer hon. Members the consolation that we approach the end, as we are now dealing with Lords amendments to the Scotland Bill. Today and next Monday, the House will be asked to consider the formidable number of amendments made to the Bill during its passage through the Lords. The Government have taken, as is traditional and proper, particularly with such complex legislation, the opportunity to strengthen and improve the Bill against its drafting when it left the House last May. I hope to persuade hon. Members that many of the changes made in their lordships' House are both desirable and to be welcomed. I am sure that the Opposition Front-Bench teams will join me in the task, looking squarely, but, I hope, briefly in most cases, at the merits of each proposal as it comes along.

It is therefore perhaps a little ironic that I have to start by asking the House to disagree with the Lords on a group of amendments that relate to a matter of some importance: the size of the Scottish Parliament, and whether it should remain, irrespective of what may happen in other parts of Scotland's parliamentary representation, at 129 Members. Let me say immediately that I believe that there is a genuine desire among most hon. Members—and among Members in the Lords—who have debated the matter to ensure that the Scottish Parliament can operate effectively and on a basis that will inspire and command public confidence. To some Conservative Members, its size is the most important or determining factor of its ability to do that. I do not agree, and want to advance some arguments to support my point of view. We believe that quality is important and that the working methods of the Parliament are an important part of the process. In addition, the involvement of the wider community beyond Parliament is an element in the general process and in the preparations made to allow the Parliament to operate effectively.

I pay tribute to the consultative steering group, to the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution and to the representatives of other parties who have joined him on the steering group. Great progress has been made: one or two ideas have been picked up and knocked about in the public press in a way that I regret, but that is the price one pays for innovating and producing ideas that are novel and depart somewhat from the precedents accepted here. We have always made it clear that we would take the best from this place, but that, if Scottish conditions made it necessary to think anew, we would not hesitate to do so.

There are points of principle involved in the Bill and in the amendments to it. One point of principle that those of us on the Government Benches think is of some significance and importance is that there is genuine virtue in a linkage between Westminster and Scottish parliamentary constituencies; and we see merit in coterminous boundaries. The White Paper "Scotland's Parliament", which is familiar to all hon. Members who have the staying power still to participate in these debates, spelt out clearly the importance that the Government attach to maintaining common boundaries for the constituencies at Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament.

Such an approach will strengthen the integrity of the United Kingdom. In addition, there are benefits from the point of view of constituents, because common boundaries will make representation easier to access. All of us know from our own experience the surprising amount of confusion that often prevails in the minds of our constituents about how the various branches and levels of government interact and interrelate. I am often more clearly recognised by my constituents as a surrogate local councillor than as a Member of Parliament. I realised early in my career that, when people approach me with problems, delivering a mini penny lecture on the fact that housing allocation is not my responsibility as a Member of Parliament, or that I am not responsible for some other aspect of local government work, does not go down well.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): In the light of what he has said, will the Secretary of State make sure that local government ward boundaries are coterminous with the proposed parliamentary boundaries? Currently, they are not.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman raises a very different issue—local government reform. He is asking me to intervene and interfere with the work of the local government boundary commission in a way that I should be loth to do. If I did attempt to do as he asks, I suspect that I should quickly run foul of my legislative duties. I know that the hon. Gentleman enjoys pursuing that argument with the dogged persistence that is his trademark, and it may be that I shall have to sit and listen to a great deal on that subject at some point in the months ahead; however, today is not that day. I merely imported local government into my argument to illustrate that lack of clarity about function is common, as is lack of clarity about boundaries.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dewar: I shall give way in a minute, first to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, and then to the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), for the Liberal Democrats.

If there are coterminous boundaries, that will encourage Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament to work together. In addition, it will mean that we have a rational structure, which is in the interests of all. Now, I give way, with pleasure, to the hon. Member for Woodspring.

Dr. Fox: May I take the Secretary of State back to point raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie)? I accept that it would be quite improper to interfere with the local government boundary commission. However, if the right hon. Gentleman's argument is not a practical point but, as he said, a point of principle, would he not have to agree that coterminosity in respect of local government is as desirable as coterminosity in respect of Westminster constituencies?

Mr. Dewar: No, the hon. Gentleman has, perhaps understandably, got my points out of order. I started with a point of principle, which was the integrity of the United Kingdom and the advantage of coterminous boundaries in that context. I should have though that that was one of the few points in our long argument on which the hon. Gentleman might have been inclined to agree with me. I then moved on to an important practical point about clarity in the system and the ability of Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of Parliament to work together. There were two points, conjoined in the text of my speech but clearly distinct in their ordering and how they were being made.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Secretary of State agree with the Minister of State? On 12 May, the Minister of State said:

"People are less concerned with maps and boundaries than they are with the quality of political contribution and of services. Yes, there is an issue, but we would do well to keep it in perspective."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 224.]

Is not the Secretary of State getting the matter a little out of perspective and adding to confusion in his announcements?

Mr. Dewar: No, I am arguing practical points about confusion, clarity and working arrangements which are relevant to the debate. If boundaries are being made an enormous sticking point and the issue is being blown out of proportion, I could—but I shall not—charge Liberal Democrat Members with doing so. We must consider the matter in proper proportion and in context, and it is worth pausing on it because it is important that we try to get it right, but it is not a breaking point in the passage of the Bill, as other hon. Members seem to think.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Why not?

Mr. Dewar: Because I do not believe in arranging matters to create barriers where no barriers need exist.

Sir Robert Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: Very well, but I should have let the hon. Gentleman intervene on a more substantial point later.

Sir Robert Smith: The substantial point is that the Secretary of State was saying that the matter should not be a great sticking point, but it is within his power to avoid its becoming a sticking point by accepting the Lords amendment, the contents of which his party signed up to when it signed the constitutional convention agreement.

Mr. Dewar: I shall come to that argument, and I do not dismiss it lightly. To give the hon. Gentleman a hint and to rehearse a point, the matter was not a sticking point for the Liberal Democrats when they gamely and effectively campaigned for a yes vote for a White Paper that encompassed the Government's position, including the point that we are making in asking for the rejection of the Lords amendments. I shall return to that point in a moment.

The practical point is that MPs and MSPs will be better placed to co-ordinate their constituency work and make sure that local interests are properly represented at Holyrood and Westminster. We want contacts between MSPs and MPs to be straightforward and their constituents to be in tune with, and aware of, the organisation and the way in which the system works. Our position would help that process.

By contrast—this is a simple point that I shall not elaborate—if we were to accept the Lords amendments, a Westminster MP would in future find that he had probably more than one MSP with whom to work and, if the boundaries were out of alignment, there would be a patchwork of overlapping boundaries, which would leave room for confusion.

Dr. Fox: It would be difficult for MSPs to have other Members roaming around their constituencies, but how does that differ from the proposals to have top-up MPs floating around the Westminster constituencies which were made in the report that Lord Jenkins published last week?

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman is looking at me in a knowing way as though he has produced a knock-out punch. I know that that is a rare feeling for him, so I am sorry to have to spoil it for him. I am making two very different points. One is about overlapping boundaries for those who have a territorial responsibility. In this case, that means Westminster MPs and MSPs elected in the constituency section by first past the post. When the hon. Gentleman brings the Jenkins proposals into the debate, he is referring to a system that includes list members, which is very different. We are discussing the territorials, if I can use that somewhat dismissive term as a shorthand to explain the point.

Let me say to those on the Liberal Benches that the parliamentary boundary commission is already required to take account of local government boundaries. It may not have done so as completely as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) would like, but the commission is required to take account of local council boundaries as part of the statutory rules. That will be the position at the next review. I hope that we will therefore minimise the overlapping, even with local government boundaries, to which he pointed.

4 pm

The Government are committed to clause 81 and to undertaking a review of the number of Scottish Members of Parliament at Westminster. It is generally accepted that

[Mr. Dewar]

we cannot justify the above-average representation that Scotland enjoys in the House of Commons. It is anticipated, and I accept, that such a review will lead to a reduction in the number of Scottish Members of Parliament, and correspondingly a reduction in the number of constituencies in Scotland. In the White Paper, we made it clear that the size of the Scottish Parliament would change to take account of changes at Westminster, so as to maintain common boundaries.

I should reassure the House that the Government have thought long and hard about the implications for the Parliament of a reduction in its size. We do not believe that such a reduction will make the Parliament less able to carry out its key roles of scrutinising effectively the Scottish Administration's work and enacting legislation.

We are not, on any realistic assessment, contemplating cutting the membership of the Parliament in half, or by a third, or even by a quarter. The reduction would amount to no more than 20 per cent. of the total numbers of seats, on most projections. Even after the review, the Scottish Parliament will still have significantly more than 100 Members.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that that is a dangerous path on which to embark? In the future, should the Government implement the findings of the Jenkins report, which foresees a 20 per cent. fall in the number of directly elected Members of Parliament, the Scottish Parliament would end up with only 48 directly elected MSPs.

Mr. Dewar: I know the hon. Gentleman. He is one of my favourite former bank managers. I am always amazed to think that he was once in charge of a branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland, where I bank, which makes that a matter of anxious interest to me.

I do not have a crystal ball. The House will remember that Lord Jenkins made it clear that any changes that might emerge from his proposals, which are representative proposals to be tested in a referendum, could not be implemented for at least eight years. Although I recognise that the hon. Gentleman has an interest in those matters, his contention is, to say the least, hypothetical.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The parliamentary boundary changes could not be implemented until the election after next, either. The Secretary of State cannot have it both ways. Is he saying that the reduction in constituency size—the reduction proposed by the Jenkins commission for Westminster—will automatically follow through for the Scottish Parliament? Will he answer the question whether that could mean a reduction in the number of directly elected constituency members to 50 or so if the Jenkins recommendations were implemented?

Mr. Dewar: That is some way—and a referendum—away. There is plenty of time to consider those matters. We must start with a reasonably stable basis. We suggested—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) laughs, but we are speaking about practical politics. Let us assume for a moment that we reduce, as we will, the number of Scottish constituencies, so that Scotland is treated in exactly the same way as the rest of the United Kingdom in respect of the boundary commission criteria, and let us assume that there is a variation. There is no reason for thinking that that would result in a Scottish Parliament that was unable to carry out its duties properly and consistently.

If the hon. Gentleman likes to think about it, let me point out that we have 72 Scottish Members of Parliament at Westminster. That increase above the United Kingdom average is justified because Scottish Members have a large number of responsibilities deriving from the distinct and different Scottish legislation, which justifies that buttressed number. I think that we are all familiar with that argument. All that additional work will go to the Scottish Parliament. On that basis, it seems right that we should have—to use a term from another area—a "level playing field" between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of the boundary commission's considerations at the next boundary review.

My point is that, even on that basis, we shall have 129 Members of Parliament in Scotland. That will be a permanent feature, irrespective of what happens at other levels of government, if the other place has its way. Those 129 Members of Parliament will do the additional work—that which is over and above the normal work of Members of Parliament in the House of Commons—but will have none of the other responsibilities that lie with Members of the House of Commons in areas such as the economy, foreign affairs, level playing field legislation, company legislation, financial services regulation and so on.

Those 129 Members of Parliament will have a very much narrower remit than do the present 72 Scottish Members of Parliament in the House of Commons. If the current representation in the House of Commons is satisfactory, I do not see why it should suddenly be anathema to have in the Scottish Parliament—which will have a very much narrower remit—almost 50 per cent. more Members. Why should that figure be written into legislation and never altered? That seems to me to be a highly illogical view, and I recommend that argument to the House.

I understand entirely the point made by the Liberal Democrats. The hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland—I have discussed the matter with him on more than one occasion—takes the view that an agreement was reached in the constitutional convention and should be honoured. That is an understandable point of view. The hon. and learned Gentleman also knows—I rehearsed this argument a minute or two ago—that, subsequent to that agreement, a White Paper was published. If he looks at paragraph 8.7 of the White Paper—I am sure that he is very familiar with it; I hardly need to quote it—he will see that it clearly states:

"The integrity of the UK will be strengthened by common UK and Scottish Parliament boundaries."

The rest of the paragraph argues that case. I think that the word "may", which is used in the last sentence, has misled some people. However, according to any reasonable

interpretation of the text, it will be seen that the point about coterminous boundaries is well made and well founded. The last sentence states:

"Any changes in Westminster constituencies will result in changes to Scottish Parliamentary constituencies; and may also lead to consequential adjustments to the size of the Scottish Parliament so as to maintain the present balance between constituency and additional Member seats."

The "may" refers to a possible variation in the corrective mechanism: the regional or top-up seats—however the House wishes to describe them.

The White Paper makes the clear point that coterminous boundaries are part of the scheme. While I do not necessarily wish to put it in terms of choice, if I were asked to choose, I would feel that the White Paper—which is of a later date, for which we all campaigned and which has been endorsed by the votes of the people—is the benchmark against which to measure those facts.

I do not wish to overdo those arguments, but I believe that there are no absolutes in such matters. None of us has an absolute view about the right size of a Parliament. We have no such idea about the House of Commons. This place comprises 659 Members, and many people think that there should be fewer Members. I do not suppose for a moment that there is unanimity on that point or on how much smaller Parliament should be.

The hon. and learned Gentleman will remind me—if he does not, I shall remind myself—that he thought at one time that the absolute right size of the Scottish Parliament was 144 Members. A special commission, chaired by Joyce McMillan, was established at the constitutional convention to examine this and related issues. It suggested that the Scottish Parliament should comprise 112 Members: 73 first past the post, plus 39 in the top-up. A compromise emerged at that point of 129 Members, and that is the starting point for the new Parliament. As I say, on top of that we have adopted the point that was made in the White Paper, which means that 129 is not just the starting point but is conditional upon the important point made in the White Paper about coterminous boundaries.

Mr. Salmond: I think that the Secretary of State is misinterpreting the Lords amendment. The purpose of the amendment is to allow the Scottish Parliament its own boundary commission and set its size on its own priorities, not to set, fixed in time, 129 as an absolute number. Can the right hon. Gentleman give any example anywhere in the world of a Parliament that judges its complexion and the numbers that should be in it on the basis of another Parliament's representations?

Mr. Dewar: I know that we have a fundamental disagreement because the hon. Gentleman naturally does not believe that a devolution settlement is a stable settlement or one that in itself is worth while. I understand that. I say naturally because, as a political point of view, he will always criticise and push for more, and ultimately wants to drive on to an entirely different political settlement. I do not think that he will carry Scotland on that, but I appreciate that that viewpoint is his.

My viewpoint is that we are looking for a new and strong voice for Scotland within the United Kingdom. We are handing over an unprecedented number of domestic areas of policy to a directly elected Scottish Parliament, where the writ of that Parliament will run unchallenged. We have retained—I think on a logical division—certain areas, which remain on a United Kingdom basis. The constitution and the boundary commission are preserved and fall into this category. That is the difference between the hon. Gentleman and myself. I accept that. I hold to the view that what we propose is sensible. That is how the White Paper was drafted and that is, in my view, how the Bill should go on to the statute book.

I do not think that this is something on which I shall be able to persuade the hon. Gentleman. I can assure him that, on this point, he will not be able to persuade me. We shall have to push on, on that basis, and agree to disagree, which is becoming something of a habit of a lifetime between us.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): How does the Secretary of State believe that reducing the size of the Scottish Parliament in the way that he suggests will help that Parliament to act as a bulwark against those in the Scottish Nationalist party who would like to exploit the difficulties of devolution as a justification for moves towards independence?

Mr. Dewar: I said earlier and I say again that those are matters of judgment. My judgment is that there is genuine virtue—I think that it is a matter of principle—in having coterminous boundaries. It may be, although I would be surprised, that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with that. Will we satisfy the people of Scotland if we make a success of the Parliament that they endorsed with their vote? We shall have to produce the right positive policies. We shall have to attack the problems of unemployment, raise education standards and build on the excellence of the health service in Scotland. I think that we shall have to argue, as I believe that we can successfully argue, that a continuing connection with the United Kingdom, with our main market in economic terms, with an area with which we have many traditional ties, where we have intermarried and intermingled, where we have had challenges, disappointments and triumphs over 300 years, makes sense. However, that is an argument for the future. No doubt, it will be maintained over quite a lengthy period.

The hon. Gentleman may think that the argument will turn on the issue of the number of Members, but I think that he is mistaken. I believe that there is no necessary correlation between the size of the Parliament and its efficiency. It could be argued, certainly on the extreme, that if there were a larger and larger number of Members, efficiency would be more and more sacrificed. That is a matter for debate. We start from the point of view of principle—

Mr. Bercow: I concede the logic

Mr. Dewar: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman's views are and I do not think that I want to know. Let us say that there is considerable concern in the House about the size of the House. A local government example is that, in most parts of the country—certainly the part of it that I know well—there are many who would argue, although no doubt others would disagree, that we should reduce the number of councillors. Consider, for example, what is being done in the new form of London government, so those things are all matters on which hon. Members

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would argue, but I certainly protest against the argument that the more we have, the more efficient we are and the more beautiful the organisation. I do not for a moment imagine, although the hon. Gentleman may not be interested in beauty, that he would disagree with that proposition.

I shall hurry on because I am being unfair to the House and many hon. Members will want to speak.

4.15 pm

The amendments create, or try to create, a role for the parliamentary boundary commission for Scotland to undertake a separate review of the parliamentary constituencies in Scotland. As the House will know, the boundary commission is required to produce a report by June 2005. It is far from clear why hon. Members feel it necessary for such a report to be available so soon. It would mean that the boundary commission would be forced to conduct a separate review of the Scottish parliamentary constituencies at the same time as it was finalising its review of the Scottish seats at Westminster. That would be an onerous burden to impose on the commission and not one that would be necessary.

If, however, we leave that to one side, one difficulty with the detailed amendments is that they propose that the report of the parliamentary boundary commission should be submitted to the Scottish Executive for subsequent approval by the Scottish Parliament. That is a reasonable proposition if hon. Members take the view that this should be not a reserved, but a devolved matter. I do not take that view. It follows from that that the attempt to reverse that decision by means of this group of amendments is not one that I am prepared to support.

Schedule 5 makes it clear that elections to the Scottish Parliament, being a fundamental part of the constitution in the United Kingdom, are reserved. To be consistent with that approach, any review of the Scottish parliamentary constituencies should be a matter for the Secretary of State and for this Parliament. To split in the way that is suggested is not necessary or desirable.

The amendments' approach is not acceptable to the Government and is not compatible with the provisions in the White Paper. Therefore, we believe that the House should disagree with the Lords in their amendment. However, I stress that the amendments pay insufficient attention to the importance of maintaining common constituency links between Westminster and Holyrood. Again, the Government believe—I just state it briefly—that the maintenance of those links is important.

I have made it clear that we are prepared, obviously, and have thought long and hard about those matters. It is clear that, for a variety of reasons, it will be some time before there is a change. No doubt, there will be possibilities to revisit the arguments if we are convinced by experience that 129 MSPs are essential and that any reduction in numbers would be a democratic disaster. If hon. Members examine that proposition, they will see that it is unlikely to be tenable. I believe that experience will not teach us that lesson. If it does, because those changes—or any changes consequent on Westminster changes—will not come in for some years, that fact will no doubt become apparent and can be taken into account. We shall have the opportunity to see how the Scottish Parliament works in practice before any changes are made to it.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Before my right hon. Friend leaves this point, I should like to make a point about paragraph 8.7. Although it clearly states:

"Responsibility for Scottish Parliamentary electoral arrangements . . . will be reserved matters",

it goes on to say that it will be a matter for the UK Parliament

"subject to consultation with the Scottish Parliament."

Will he confirm that there is no change in that position?

Mr. Dewar: It would be odd of me, if, having rested heavily on paragraph 8.7 of the White Paper, I then announced a retreat from what it says. Of course there will be consultation. The point that is made by the amendments and by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is that there should be not consultation, but a transfer of power. In the context of the whole shape of the devolution package, that would not be sensible, wise or compatible with what we have been doing over the long periods of consultation and debate.

I say again that, over the next few years, we shall have experience of the Scottish Parliament in operation and can then assess how dependent it is on having 129 MSPs for its success. I suspect that that will not be a determining factor. What I believe will be the success of the Parliament will depend on its ability to deliver, to respond to Scottish public opinion and to involve Scottish public opinion in its affairs.

Dr. Fox: It does not seem long since we last debated the Bill. The difference is that now we have quite a different Bill before us. One point on which I agree with the Secretary of State is that many of the changes are desirable and should be welcomed.

I pay tribute to what are affectionately called the MacKay twins—Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish and Lord Mackay of Drumadoon—who did a great deal of work in the other place. They were able to reach agreement with Ministers on many aspects, all of which improve the Bill that left this House. However, there is a point to be made: the Government introduced 180 groups of amendments to their flagship Bill in a House that they claim does not have proper democratic legitimacy and needs to be changed.

Mr. Swayne: Did not many of the Government amendments in the other place bear a striking resemblance to amendments originally suggested by the twins to whom my hon. Friend referred?

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I do not want to be ungracious at the outset of our debate. I am happy when the Government find humility and recognise when they are wrong. We will always welcome that. Indeed, I hope that they will do so again today. There has been a tight time scale for Opposition parties, with major amendments to Third Reading being tabled by the Government on Monday night, thereby giving us little time to assess their full impact. We said a long time ago that the time management of the Bill left something to be desired.

The Secretary of State said on Second Reading, and it is worth reminding the House—*[Interruption.]* I know that the right hon. Gentleman finds it difficult to see and listen at the same time. His original approach was that the Bill would be framed against the background of a worst case scenario, in particular in a way that would not provide the nationalists and separatists with a wedge to drive between Edinburgh and Westminster. We have also taken that approach through the passage of the Bill; it has been a consistent theme. However, what the Secretary of State is defending today will have precisely the opposite effect to his stated intent. The first thing that will be required to make the Scottish Parliament work properly is stability, but what is guaranteed by what he is defending is instability.

We already know what changes will come about as a result of other parts of the Bill. We know that the number of Scottish Members of Parliament will be reduced from 72 to about 58, if we have the same size electorates that we have for the remainder of the United Kingdom. That is a generally accepted point in the debate. That will reduce the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament by 14 for directly elected seats and eight for top-up. It is not a good basis on which to start a Parliament—knowing that, very soon afterwards, possibly within its first term and certainly within its second, there will be a major redistribution. With the best will in the world, there will be division among Members. We know that from our experience in the House when there is a boundary review. People naturally want to defend their constituencies and continue to look after the interests of their constituents. It is not a proper basis for stability.

I do not accept the Secretary of State's argument—really just an assertion—that the matter should be left to his judgment and that we should accept that. I remember that, on Second Reading, we were told that only by accepting the Secretary of State's judgment could we stop a resurgence of Scottish nationalism. Since then, the Scottish National party, much to my deep upset, has been doing rather well; it is the Labour party which has been doing badly in Scotland.

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): What about the Conservative party?

Dr. Fox: I can tell the hon. Gentleman about my party's success. In local government by-elections in Scotland, the Labour party has dropped the most votes, while the other three parties have gained, especially since the devolution referendum.

Mr. Dewar: By what percentage?

Dr. Fox: What matters most to the Secretary of State is by how much our vote has risen, rather than the fact that his party's vote has dropped. That says a great deal about a party that was pinning all its hopes on delivering the right hon. Gentleman's devolution package.

Far more important, the Secretary of State said that only by producing this particular package could we defend the Union. However, it seems now that the Union is more imperilled than at any time in our recent history. The Secretary of State's judgment therefore means nothing to Opposition Members.

I do not want to go into the breach of faith perceived by the Liberal Democrats, as it was not something to which the Conservative party was a party. However, if the Secretary of State was willing to amend some parts of the Bill—which was based on the White Paper—in the other place, why is he unwilling to amend other parts of it? Why should some parts be sacrosanct while others are not? A logical case has not been made to support that position, but then neither has a logical case been made to support any of the Secretary of State's other comments in this debate.

The most important point is that, if the Scottish Parliament is to fund arrangements through the Scottish block, surely it makes sense for the Scottish Parliament itself to decide on its priorities. It seems perfectly logical for the Scottish Parliament to want to reduce the number of those sitting in the Parliament so that it can spend more on something else. Conversely, if the Scottish Parliament decides that it wants to spend more money on the Scottish Parliament, why should it not have a chance to do so? It seems very strange to be unwilling to devolve any authority on the matter.

It would seem to make perfect sense for the Conservative party—and other parties, too—to campaign on reducing the costs of the Scottish Parliament, and therefore on being able to spend more of the Scottish block on other priorities. That is a matter of legitimate political debate in Scotland, and it would be stifled by the Secretary of State's proposals.

Today, we are witnessing another misjudgment by the Government, who are simply defending the stubbornness of the Secretary of State, or perhaps of those in Downing street. Regardless, the downside of such stubbornness will be unnecessary division and instability in the Scottish Parliament at a time when it most needs stability. That cannot be to the advantage of the United Kingdom, this Parliament or the Scottish Parliament, and it can act only in favour of those who want a wedge to be driven between Edinburgh and this place. It can help only the separatists. Even at this late stage, I hope that the Government will reconsider.

Mr. Wallace: It is not surprising that I disagree with the Secretary of State in disagreeing with the Lords amendments. The amendments are similar to those that I moved in the House in Committee and on Report, and were moved by my noble Friends in another place, where they were passed.

It should be remembered that, both in Committee and on Report, when I moved those similar amendments, the mood music from the Treasury Bench was relatively sweet. The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution said that the Government were listening and would consider the arguments being made. On Report, he said that I had

"made a strong and very reasoned case to retain the size of the Scottish Parliament at 129 members".

and confirmed that

"the Government would reflect carefully on the issues that he raised."

There was perhaps an expectation in another place that things might be changed. Therefore, there was profound disappointment when, in another place, albeit with not

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much conviction, Lord Sewel sought to defend the position. I wondered whether there was perhaps some confusion about what the Minister had said. He said:

"We are still considering the matter, and we hope to reach a conclusion by the time that the Bill goes to another place."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 223-34.]

But Ministers dug in their heels.

The suspicion—on which press speculation has dwelt—is that the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution and the Scottish Office were very much persuaded by the arguments made in this place to retain the size of the Parliament at 129, but that No. 10 Downing street—the Prime Minister himself—has been the blocking factor.

The Scottish Constitutional Convention negotiations—which the Secretary of State mentioned—that reached the compromise figure of 129 were quite fraught. When the 129 figure was reached, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie)—who was not then an hon. Member—sent me a fax which almost burnt my fax machine, as he thought that we should have stood out for 145. I say that to underline that it was not an easy negotiation. It was not simply an agreement between two parties, but reflected a broad base of Scottish civic opinion. The agreement stated:

"the system the Convention has devised is the outcome of long and detailed discussions, and is underpinned by fundamental principles including proportionality and the opportunity for equal representation. It should not be easily challenged or changed without careful and democratic scrutiny."

Regrettably, the Government are departing from that today.

The Secretary of State argued the case on the basis of the White Paper, although, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, on other matters the Government are clearly prepared to move away from it. In fact, we shall be debating a significant change in the manner in which judges can be dismissed—a change with which we agree.

4.30 pm

In other cases, the Secretary of State has moved away from the convention agreement. For example, we are to have a system of reserved powers rather than detailed devolved powers. We welcome that as it was something of which we tried to persuade the Labour party in the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

I do not remember many speeches by the Secretary of State during the referendum campaign in which he referred to paragraph 8.7 of the White Paper. Nevertheless, he rests his case on that and it seems to be one of his best points. However, in earlier debates, the Government suggested that they might be prepared to negotiate, so they cannot pin too much of their argument to the White Paper.

We wish to retain larger numbers of MSPs because all parties agree—the Secretary of State rightly paid tribute to the work of the consultative steering group, a constructive working group of which I am pleased to be a member—that the Scottish Parliament should work very much on a committee basis and that committees will have an important role to play. Those committees must have sufficient numbers to make them worth while.

The figure of 129 is important, as it delivers a degree of proportionality that allows for a fair representation of all sections of Scottish political opinion in the Scottish Parliament. I know that the Secretary of State—I have had this discussion with him many times—believes that inserting the ratio of 73 to 56 in the Bill will mean that, when the Parliament is downsized, it will maintain the same degree of proportionality. However, I believe that, if there are fewer additional Members to correct, the level of correction must be lower; therefore, it will not be as proportional. I do not doubt the Secretary of State's good faith—he is just arithmetically wrong.

The Prime Minister's argument is based on the White Paper which talks about the need for coterminous boundaries. The Secretary of State suggested that not having coterminous boundaries might lead to confusion. That argument continued to be peddled on Report, and the Minister addressed it when he said:

"I do not think that the electorate are as confused as some hon. Members think. Because hon. Members are concerned about boundaries, we assume that the electors are also concerned. However, electors in my constituency are a very sharp, bright bunch—which they demonstrate at every election, by voting in a very superior way."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 224.]

I am sure that, even with non-coterminous boundaries, they would be equally sharp. The Minister put the argument into some perspective on Report.

Are the Government and the Secretary of State trying to persuade the House that the integrity of the Union depends on whether the boundary for Edinburgh, South runs up Warrender Park road or Marchmont road? If the Union is in such a perilous state that one road may make a difference, heaven help us. I think that the opposite is the case. If, in eight years' time, it is seen to be at the hand of Westminster that the number of MSPs is being cut, that could give rise to tensions between Westminster and Holyrood and undermine the Union. On that particular argument, the Government have got it wrong.

The agenda in relation to the size of the Parliament may be that the Prime Minister wants a reduced Parliament. We are always brought back to the obstinacy of a Prime Minister who legislates for devolution and talks about devolution, but does not seem to understand it, so today the Secretary of State has to come here and be his master's voice. This matter is important for the future of the Scottish Parliament. If the Labour party makes any agreement in the Scottish Parliament, will it have to be countersigned by Downing street in order to be delivered or will we be able to trust the Government, as we thought that we could when they agreed the constitutional convention?

Contrast that with my party, which already has devolution in its federal structure. I have made it clear to my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) that, regardless of agreements to extend the remit of Cabinet Committees or anything else that may happen at Westminster, the Scottish Liberal Democrats are sovereign on matters that are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. He accepts that.

Dr. Fox: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that de-linkage does not necessarily mean that the numbers will be set in stone? The Scottish Parliament could change the numbers if it felt that that was appropriate. That is surely the best mechanism for

defusing any potential tension between Edinburgh and here, which is what I thought that we were doing in removing what we called the wedge.

Mr. Wallace: In an effort to get some agreement, we have been willing to say that 129 was not sacrosanct, but, unfortunately, the Prime Minister has not been willing to show any sign of compromise. Last Saturday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil made a proposal, which I suggested to the Prime Minister, that when the boundary commission reviews Westminster boundaries, the electoral commission recommended by the Jenkins commission and the Neill committee—or a Scottish sub-committee of it—should examine the workings of the Scottish Parliament and consider how many Members were needed for its committee structure to work effectively, taking into account the relative proportionality on which the first elections would be fought and the geography of Scotland so that we did not have vast constituencies. The point about what might happen under the Jenkins proposals, which would leave only 48 first-past-the-post or alternative vote seats, is relevant. The commission should recommend the smallest number of Members that could deliver an effective Parliament, having regard to all those points.

That compromise proposal shows that we have the issue in perspective and are not tied to the figure of 129. The proposal still lies on the table. If the other place insists on its amendment—I shall urge my noble Friends to do so—and the Government have to come up with a compromise, the suggestion will still be there.

Lord Sewel said in another place that, some years down the line, perhaps the Scottish Parliament could say to Westminster that it needed greater numbers. I am sure that Westminster would think seriously about that, but if the measure were set in statute, primary legislation would be needed. All of us, from those who have been here as long as the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) to those as recently arrived as the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), have heard the Government say at some point that their timetable does not allow time for a particular measure. If this provision were taken out of the Bill, Westminster would at some stage be obliged to address the issue and legislate on it without any preconditions. Our proposal was put forward in the spirit of trying to find a compromise. It remains on the table.

That is why I say that we have the issue in perspective. Surely the Secretary of State did not expect us not to support a yes campaign in the referendum because we disagreed with one paragraph of the White Paper. On Second Reading, the Government said that they were willing to listen constructively to amendments and amend the Bill accordingly. It is disappointing that they have not accepted our arguments. The House may have to debate the issue again before the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State began the debate by warning everyone that the end was nigh. I hope that that apocalyptic warning will not apply to me, too, because I cannot join my right hon. Friend tonight in voting down the Lords amendment.

I agree with my right hon. Friend that the size of the Parliament is not necessarily the most important issue at stake. Voters tend to favour fewer politicians rather than more if they are given the choice. However, the manner in which we arrive at the size of the Parliament is fundamental. My right hon. Friend did not address the fundamental point—which has been raised by the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)—that the figure of 129 was not plucked out of the air. It was agreed inside the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

Not only the figure but any future change to the figure was agreed inside the Scottish Constitutional Convention. As members of the convention, the Labour party agreed that any future reduction in the size of the Scottish Parliament would be carried out by a separate boundary commission for Scotland and on the advice of the Scottish Parliament. That was in the agreement. We gave our word that, were we ever to form the Government of the United Kingdom, we would implement that agreement. We are certainly not doing that here and now by opposing the amendment.

There was more than just cross-party agreement. The only political parties that were inside the convention were us, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens and the Communists—or the Democratic Left, or whatever they called themselves at that time—but many other people took part. The trade unions—an essential part of our party—were separately represented, to give their agreement to any future change. The Churches and women's organisations were involved, as were representatives of the ethnic minorities. What we now call Scottish civil society was inside the Scottish Constitutional Convention. We agreed with them all about changing the size of the Scottish Parliament in the future. We should not break our word to Scottish civil society, or to the other political parties inside the convention, as lightly as we appear to be doing tonight.

My right hon. Friend referred to paragraph 87 of the White Paper. I must say, in all honesty, that I was not aware of paragraph 87. I suspect that a lot of people in Scotland were not aware of it. Perhaps I would not have welcomed the White Paper as warmly as I did when it was announced in the House had I known that that paragraph existed. It is a relatively obscure paragraph in the White Paper, and my right hon. Friend was at least honest enough to say that it does not actually say in the White Paper that the size of the Parliament will be changed—it says that it "may" be changed. Of course, that is a favourite parliamentary word for putting things off and not confronting them at the time.

My right hon. Friend reassured my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) that any future reduction in the size of the Scottish Parliament would be subject to consultation with the Scottish Parliament. What happens if the Scottish Parliament says no? What happens if the Scottish Parliament says, "We do not want the size of the Parliament reduced—we want to retain 129 Members"? If Westminster consults and the Scottish Parliament says no, what does Westminster do then? Will it send the tanks up to surround Holyrood to demand that 20 Members get out, or else? We are getting ourselves into a ridiculous situation.

I, too, campaigned for a yes, yes vote in the referendum. My right hon. Friend may well remember that, along with a certain Mr. Phil Gallie—late of this House—I acted as the warm-up act for a big Scottish Television programme involving my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the leaders of the Liberal

[Mr. John McAllion]

Democrats and the Scottish National party taking on the Tories, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the vice-chairman of Rangers. It was a tremendous debate with hundreds of members of the public present. Nobody referred to any possibility that the size of the Parliament might be reduced in future.

I never came across a single incident during the campaign in which that issue was shown the light of day. No one was aware during the referendum campaign that there was the potential for the Scottish Parliament to be reduced in size by Act of the Westminster Parliament. We must be honest and state that that is the case, and not try to hide behind the referendum result as if it were an endorsement of the Westminster Parliament being able to reduce the size of the Scottish Parliament. It certainly was not, and I know that my right hon. Friend would not pretend that that issue had anything to do with the result of 11 September.

Dr. Lynda Clark (Edinburgh, Pentlands): I may be hallucinating, but my recollection is that it was headline news in some of the Scottish papers that such a reduction might be a consequence of the White Paper. Perhaps my hon. Friend did not read the papers at that time.

Mr. McAllion: I certainly do not read the same papers as my hon. and learned Friend does, and I did not see that reference. I am making a basic point which none of my right hon. or hon. Friends could deny: the Scottish people who voted yes, yes on 11 September did not do so on the basis that they wanted to see the size of the Scottish Parliament reduced by the Westminster Parliament. Anyone who argues that they did is not arguing in the real world.

I believe that the Westminster Parliament should not be imposing change on Scotland by giving effect to the doctrine of Westminster sovereignty or supremacy. Devolution in the form proposed inside the Scottish Constitutional Convention is opposed to the doctrine of Westminster sovereignty. My hon. Friends and I signed the foundation document for that convention, the Claim of Right for Scotland, which asserted the sovereignty of the Scottish people, setting that against the concept of parliamentary sovereignty, which this Parliament favours. We all signed up to it and stood by it. Having said that we think that the Scottish people are sovereign, we should not allow the Westminster Parliament to use its sovereignty to impose a change in the Scottish Parliament without any reference to the Scottish people or their Parliament.

What will be the response of my hon. Friends if the Scottish Parliament says no? What will be the response of the United Kingdom Cabinet if Scotland says that it does not want its Parliament to be reduced in size? Will we overrule Scotland's objections or will we seek to impose Westminster's will on Scotland?

4.45 pm

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that constitutional matters are a reserved area and therefore outwith the remit of the Scottish Parliament. The logic of that position is to say that that Parliament, like local government in Scotland, is a creature of statute—that it is what Westminster says it is and is not what Westminster says it is not. Again, I do not remember any Labour politician arguing that in Scotland in the past 10 years. They are arguing it here tonight, but they have not done so before and it is not an argument by which we should stand.

My hon. Friends understand that Westminster sovereignty does not in any case apply in the real world. Suppose that the Scottish Parliament decided to hold a referendum on independence and found the money within its budget. Even though that is a reserved matter, so it would not constitutionally be allowed to do so, how would anyone stop it? It cannot be stopped, so in reality it will be in sovereign control of its own affairs. The sooner we recognise that and stop trying to impose Westminster's will on the Scottish Parliament, the better we will get on with that Parliament.

Dr. Clark: I have been following my hon. Friend's tortuous logic, and it occurs to me that he would presumably say that the Scottish Parliament could take on defence or foreign affairs on its own say-so. Would that be correct according to his logic?

Mr. McAllion: I think that it is the position of the Labour party. If the Scottish people ever elected a sufficient majority of Scottish National party members to a Scottish Parliament, the SNP would hold a referendum and, if the people then said yes to independence, Westminster could do nothing about it. That is a reality and everyone accepts it, even the Conservatives. It may be tortuous logic to my hon. and learned Friend, but it certainly is not to the people of Scotland.

We are also told that it is important that we match the constituencies of Westminster Members of Parliament with those of Members of the Scottish Parliament. Why? The European constituencies do not match and nor do the local government constituencies—there are regular changes in their sizes. Also, the list MSPs have nothing to do with the Westminster constituencies, so why is it only the directly elected Members of the Scottish Parliament who have to be linked to those constituencies? The elections will be held in different years and will involve different individuals. The candidates who stand in the two elections will be different, so I do not understand why the constituencies cannot be different. That does not present any problems for me.

We are also told that the linkage between the size of the Scottish Parliament and the size of Scottish seats at Westminster will strengthen the Union because of the common boundaries. I think that it will have the opposite effect. It gives the impression that the Westminster Parliament is interfering in Scottish affairs—that it will bully Scotland into changes that it does not want. That will give succour to those people who want to present Westminster as constantly interfering with Scotland and who want the Westminster Parliament out of Scottish affairs altogether.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that the minds of the voters are confused. They will not be confused if Westminster forces a change in the Scottish Parliament that it does not want: the message will be clear, and it will be the wrong message—for the Labour party in particular.

Finally, we are talking not merely about a 20 per cent. reduction as a result of the changes that the Government are trying to force through tonight, but about a further

20 per cent. reduction that will take place thereafter because of the Jenkins proposals, which will also affect Scotland. The size of the Scottish Parliament will be constantly changing, and that is bound to lead to tensions between Members of the Scottish Parliament. I cannot think of any politician who would voluntarily fall on his sword because the number of seats was being reduced. There will be bitter fights not only between sitting Members of the Scottish Parliament who want to hold on to their seats, but between those wanting to be on the list or to be higher on the list. There will be constant crises and revolutions in the parties.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will not that bitterness start on the first day of the Parliament? My hon. Friend knows well my attitude to the whole scheme, but it is unfair on individuals that they will have to start with this recipe for bitterness.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. No one knows exactly how the number of constituencies will be reduced, but we can expect Glasgow and Edinburgh to lose seats. All the Members of the Scottish Parliament who are elected to represent constituencies in those cities will know that they will have to fight one another to hold on to their seats.

I know that some people will be retiring—such as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is to lead the Labour party in the Scottish Parliament—but other candidates will be young. They will have a lifetime in politics ahead of them and will not want to lose their seats within four or eight years of being elected to the Scottish Parliament.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend's point, which he makes with passion, is perhaps at the root of the argument. As a Member representing an Edinburgh seat, I believe that one cannot expect a job for life in Westminster or in the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Wallace: A Rifkind gain.

Dr. Clark: Perhaps at some other time.

It is important that democratic change is possible. We cannot set up the Parliament with the argument that it will be terribly sad if—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. and learned Lady will remember on whom she is intervening.

Dr. Clark: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I got carried away.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. and learned Friend is reasonably new to parliamentary politics. Of course none of us can expect to have a seat for life, but most of us will try to have a seat for life. If she looks around her, she will see an awful lot of hon. Members who have been here a long time and intend to stay for a long time—they will fight to the death to retain their right to be the Member of Parliament for whatever constituency they come from.

We know from experience that the panel system, which may have sounded like a good idea on paper, has led to bitter recriminations not only within the Labour party—although perhaps particularly the Labour party—but within other parties. There is ill feeling and bitterness, dividing party member from party member. The Government's proposals are a recipe for future bitterness in all the political parties.

I object to the fact that the measure is being imposed through Westminster sovereignty. If 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament say no, what will happen to the Government's proposals? Will Westminster assert its right, because the constitution is a reserved matter, to force the change down the Scottish Parliament's throat? I certainly would not support that, and I doubt whether many people in Scotland would do so.

Dr. Fox: It has been obvious in the debate that both those who welcome devolution with open arms and those who are sceptical about it think that the Government's proposals are bad. Will the hon. Gentleman speculate on why his party leadership is clinging to the proposals so desperately?

Mr. McAllion: I would rather speculate on why the hon. Gentleman, who is very sceptical about devolution, thinks that the proposals are bad. He defeats his own argument.

I am talking about a matter of principle. Some people believe in principle that the Scottish Parliament should be subservient to Westminster; they believe that authority, supremacy and sovereignty rightly rest in Westminster. Those people are entitled to believe that, but I am not one of them. I passionately believe that the idea behind devolution is that sovereignty should be shared between the different democratic institutions in the United Kingdom.

That sharing of sovereignty means that the Scottish Parliament and the boundary commission should decide on future changes in constituency sizes. Indeed, I am not convinced that they will not reduce the size of constituencies anyway, and I would love the number of Westminster Members of Parliament to be drastically reduced. As hon. Members know well, ordinary Back Benchers get to speak only once or twice a year, or perhaps every three months—unless the debate is about an issue such as Scottish devolution, on which no one else wants to speak. There are too many Members of Parliament. The House of Commons could easily do its work with about 200 or 300 Members, although that is another argument, and I am well behind with my hon. Friends already.

I appeal to my right hon. and hon. Friends: if they persist with this course of action, they will only bring this Parliament into conflict with the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people. That is in no one's interest, least of all the Labour party's. We should not be trying to push through a measure that will have that effect.

Mr. Salmond: In his usual engaging way, the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) said that the public would probably agree with him in preferring a Parliament with fewer Members. I suspect that the popularity or otherwise of such a move would depend on which ones we got rid of.

Those on both sides of the argument have asserted that the case to which they are opposed would jeopardise the essential integrity of the United Kingdom. I feel as though

[Mr. Salmond]

I have to act as an umpire and decide which is the true Unionist case. If I am to act in that capacity, I will have to blow for no side. Neither argument will determine the fate of the United Kingdom, which I believe is already determined.

Neither argument will save the United Kingdom, so let us consider them both on their merits. The Secretary of State said that he did not think that the integrity of the United Kingdom would turn on numbers in the Scottish Parliament, so why is there such fierce resistance to what is, remarkably for the House of Lords, a reasonable amendment? I have been a Member of Parliament for more than 10 years, and I certainly would not have to take my shoes off to count the number of reasonable amendments that I have seen from the House of Lords. Perhaps this commonsense amendment should be considered according to commonsense criteria.

It was suggested that the Parliament's efficiency might be improved if the number of Members were reduced, but proportionality would certainly be jeopardised. When the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) argued that proportionality would be compromised by reducing the number of Members, I saw some Labour mathematicians shaking their heads, but it is true that, the lower the number, the more difficult it is to use a top-up to bring about a proportionate parliament. Even the figure of 129 does not guarantee a proportionate Parliament, although it guarantees one that is more proportionate than under first past the post.

The Minister's expression seems to offer an endorsement of what I am saying. The lower the number, the more difficult it is to get proportionality. If proportionality is a key argument behind the figure of 129, it should be a key argument not for a static position but for having no fewer than 129 Members.

The Secretary of State told us that he thought that coterminosity—I think—was crucial, and that it was a point of principle, connecting the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments; but that is not in the Bill. There are separate Members for Orkney and for Shetland in the Bill, but there is only one hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland in the House of Commons: more than enough, some of his colleagues might say. There is no coterminosity now.

It has already been mentioned that European and local government boundaries have often not been perfectly aligned with parliamentary boundaries, so the idea that people in Scotland will be fashing themselves about trying to work it all out and will be hopelessly confused if the Westminster and Scottish Parliament boundaries are not exactly parallel is absolutely farcical. People are entirely able to find their MSPs, their MEPs and their list MSPs in the new structure, without that being adduced as a serious argument in defence of an indefensible position.

I do not for a second believe that deciding whether to allow a separate boundary commission to determine the optimum number of Members for the Scottish Parliament would make the essential difference between an independent and an a devolved Parliament, but it is one criterion by which to judge the difference between a devolved Parliament and what is in effect a super-council. There are few, if any, examples of a legislative body—which is the definition of a Parliament—anywhere in the world allowing another legislative body to set the number of members that that Parliament should have.

The idea that one can judge the appropriate number of MSPs in Edinburgh on the basis of the possible reduction in the number of Members of the Westminster Parliament to reflect the population balance of the United Kingdom, and the possible further reduction if the Jenkins commission has its way, is absolutely farcical. There is no argument for allowing other people, on other criteria and with other motivations, to set the appropriate number of Members for the Scottish Parliament.

5 pm

The debate is about not the integrity of the United Kingdom, but about a commonsense amendment that should be accepted. However, running through the debate is what the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan)—in a robust interview on Radio Scotland this morning—described as the control-freak tendency. Substantial suggestions have been made, partly sourced from the attitude of the Minister of State to the amendments at earlier stages, that the hon. Gentleman does not support the Government's position. The hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland has suggested that even the Scottish Office does not support the Government's position.

The control-freak tendency is affecting a number of issues at the moment. The Government appear to say, "Have a Welsh Assembly, as long as we can decide who might lead it. Have a mayor for London, as long as we can exclude one of the more popular contenders. Have devolution for BBC Scotland, as long as it is not allowed to have a Scottish six o'clock news. Have a Scottish Parliament, but Westminster will still retain the absolute right to determine the number of its members." The background to the debate is that the Government have suddenly realised that the consequences of the policies they have been pursuing are not as they intended. They are trying to draw back under centralised control some of the ability of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the London mayor and the BBC to respond to the implications of the Government's proposals. That is not a commonsense approach and it is much later than the Government think for the implications of their policies. They are defending the indefensible in rejecting a commonsense amendment from the Lords and it will not secure the fate of the United Kingdom. In fact, it will accelerate the strong suspicion in Scotland that centralised control from the Labour party should be rejected next May.

Mr. Dalyell: I understand that 129 separate offices are to be built for the Members of the Scottish Parliament. That takes us to 2001. If my calculations are right, the next elections will be in 2003, so some offices will receive only two years' use. Will not that be a matter for ribaldry and what will be the effect on the construction of the building?

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I shall make only a brief contribution. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's arguments about coterminous boundaries, but they would have more force if we had 72 Members of this House and 72 Members elected on the first-past-the-post boundaries

for the Scottish Parliament, without a list. Accountability would be muddied by the list Members in a ward, especially if it had several Members from different political parties. That would cause tremendous confusion. The argument for coterminous boundaries for Westminster and the Scottish Parliament is marginal, given that the waters have already been muddied by the list system.

Boundaries have diverged in several instances. At the moment, Members of the European Parliament are elected for constituencies that include six or seven Westminster constituencies, but because the cycle of elections for the European Parliament and Westminster does not match, parliamentary boundary reviews have meant that Members of the European Parliament have represented constituencies with slightly different borders to the constituencies of those elected to this House. The world has not collapsed because that has happened. We have heard many examples of local government boundaries that are not coterminous and of councillors with wards that span more than one parliamentary constituency. The slightly bizarre proposals for London suggest that boroughs should be linked. In August, the Local Government Commission suggested splitting the City of London from Westminster, so that the City of London joined Tower Hamlets and Barking, and Westminster joined with western boroughs. There is substantial inconsistency in the Government's position. I would have more sympathy with the argument that the integrity and coterminosity of parliamentary boundaries are important if it were applied consistently across the Government's constitutional programme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made the significant point that, with any constitutional change, it is important to have stability and some sort of settlement. To start with a proposal involving a drop from 129 Members is a recipe for instability. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that it will feed resentment that the institution has been designed for a certain number, right or wrong, but that the number will start to be reduced soon after it is set up. That resentment will be used by those who wish to break up the United Kingdom to fan the flames of disunity. If we are going to get it right, why not get it right from the beginning? Why set off with 129 and then reduce the number?

I do not wish to fan the flames of division in the United Kingdom, but my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring made a good point. We have to test the proposals against the worst case, not the best. This proposal will cause argument, disunity and difficulty, and I therefore support my hon. Friend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Michael Clapham—I am sorry, Mr. Michael Connarty.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I take that as a compliment Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I think very highly of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) and the work that he has done for the miners. I should have thought that, since you and I spent some time together on a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association trip a while ago, you might recognise me.

Oddly, I found myself agreeing with the tenor of the remarks of the leader of the Scottish National party—that the Union and the future of devolution will not be affected by anything that we do on this matter. When compared with what devolution is really about the question of how many Members there should be is a case of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.

I was worried that the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) got so passionate. Is this really about numbers or only about the number of Liberal Democrats who might get in if there are 129 Members or more? Because of his past contributions, I had thought that it was usually quality rather than quantity that counted with the Liberal Democrats. This seemed to be a quantity argument.

I respect the principles of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion). I recognise nationalist principles when I hear them, and his was one of the best nationalist speeches that I have heard in this House. I do not think much of the quality of the ones that come from the official Scottish National party.

Mr. Wallace: In some respects, my argument was about numbers—not only the number of Liberal Democrats but of Labour, Conservative and Scottish National party Members. It is about the principle of proportionality. On the referendum campaign, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that selling the case for proportionality was one of the key things that allowed every part of Scotland to deliver a yes vote to the principle of devolution. Diluting that proportionality, more than anything that could be said about the White Paper, could undermine the good faith of those of us who fought for the yes campaign.

Mr. Connarty: I will deal with proportionality later because I do not think that the Bill is a closed door on that. The words of the Secretary of State—tomorrow's *Hansard* will confirm it—show that it is not a closed door. There is a mechanism for looking at the number of Scottish Members of this House and the number in the Scottish Parliament.

The important thing is that the people of Scotland do not want to focus on what the Parliament will be. The worry of people outside is that they regard us as debating what we see as our fiefdom, our little Chamber, our sets of offices and our fancy potato or upturned boat or whatever it is that Members will meet in. People are beginning to worry that we have forgotten why we set out on this trail so many years ago. It was to do something for the Scottish people, not for the politicians of Scotland.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the people of Scotland being worried. Does he consider that 23,000 people in Falkirk, West might be extremely worried that their democratic will has been totally ignored by the small committee of new Labour that has decided to ignore the fact that, for 24 years, they have elected the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) to be their Member of Parliament? Those 23,000 people are now being told that the hon. Gentleman is not fit to be a Member of Parliament. Of course, I am not suggesting that he is not.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Is the hon. Lady trying to give me the kiss of death?

Mr. Connarty: I was about to say something similar. Until this evening, the star of my hon. Friend the Member

[Mr. Connarty]

for Falkirk, West was buoyant, but I think it has just been shot out of the sky by that intervention. I am sure that the matter to which the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) refers will be resolved in the fulness of time and we shall discover whether the people of Falkirk, West want to choose their current Member of the UK Parliament or some other person. I leave it to them and I respect the electorate's wishes. I just hope that the people who turned out to vote for me—who number slightly more than 23,000—will turn out and vote for whichever Labour candidate is picked to stand for the Falkirk, East seat in the Scottish Parliament.

Principle is important, but people should know that we are now looking at what we are going to do for them and what is the overall logic. The logic of partnership that comes out of having coterminous, or as near coterminous as possible, constituencies is extremely important. I know that there are exceptions, but it was disingenuous of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) to use two constituencies in the islands to show that that exception means that there is no logic on the mainland in having coterminous constituencies.

I look forward to working with a Member of the Scottish Parliament for a coterminous constituency. We have all tried to build links with local government bodies and it is normal for groups of Members of Parliament from various areas to meet frequently in this place—the Glasgow group of Members of Parliament, for example. With my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West, I have worked with Falkirk council. Coterminosity of focus is important and it is something that the ordinary public will regard as being logical.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Connarty: I shall in a moment. The ordinary public would like to think that the service that we deliver to them, the way in which we deliver it and the way in which hon. Members have coterminous responsibilities is all done for their sake, but I believe that the people of Scotland will see the argument in which we are engaged as one between politicians who are trying to look after themselves.

I hope that the principle of proportionality, which was mentioned earlier, will be addressed in the numbers that come out of this Parliament and that that will be done in such a way as not to damage fundamentally that proportionality. As a supporter of the Labour campaign for electoral reform, I think that that is a good move forward, but we must not disregard the public's desire to be represented in a way that makes logical sense to them.

The public are not confused, but they are unhappy. They already manage to find their way to the right door or doors to get their problems solved, but it would be better if we did not make their path more complicated just because we have other agendas, whether getting more members of our party into the Scottish Parliament, or having a larger number of MSPs just for the sake of it. A dialogue is possible, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Connarty: No, the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) asked to intervene first.

I would argue that, if we can simplify the process of engagement with the public and the role we carry out, that will be welcome. Coterminous constituencies are part of that logic.

Mr. Swayne: Although I accept that coterminosity is important, does the hon. Gentleman accept that it should be a matter for consideration by the Members of the Scottish Parliament? They should be included in the decision on such an important matter, but, at the moment, a fait accompli is being imposed on them, before they have even taken their seats.

Mr. Connarty: We published the White Paper and we all got behind it; we got the people to support our proposals at the general election and in the referendum; and now we are carrying out what was proposed. In a sense, everything was set by that White Paper. I do not think that we should allow the Scottish National party, the Conservative party, or those who worry that the principle of sovereignty is more important than the delivery of service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East seems to be arguing, to try to use the differences to their own advantage.

I believe that we have reached a point where the Scottish Parliament will talk to the UK Parliament and the response to the UK boundary review will take into account its impact on the Scottish Parliament. If things do not happen like that, we will have missed a chance for co-operation, and it is co-operation that will make devolution work, whereas conflict will deliver what the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan wants—independence for Scotland.

Mr. Salmond: Barring the party list, each elector will have one MSP and one Westminster Member of Parliament. The only possible confusion would be between the Members themselves. The hon. Gentleman has relationships with a Member of the European Parliament, who has relationships with another—let me rephrase that: he has an association with an MEP who has an association with seven other Members of Parliament. Does that MEP have any difficulty in having an association with eight different Westminster Members of Parliament whose constituencies fall within his constituency's boundary?

Mr. Connarty: In reality, at any time and in any part of the country, most people have great difficulty in grasping what a Member of the European Parliament does and for whom he does it. The hon. Gentleman's argument is a weak one.

Dr. Fox: Surely the point is that the Lords amendments do not prevent coterminosity; they give the Scottish Parliament the freedom to make up its own mind on the matter. It is the de-linkage that is the important point, because it allows the Scottish Parliament or the majority of Members of the Scottish Parliament to do whatever they think is best. What is wrong with that?

5.15 pm

Mr. Connarty: It is funny, but when the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) stands up and defends any part of devolution, the words "crocodile tears" spring to mind. I wonder why that is.

We have only a short time, so I should like to move on. I am concerned—I believe that the people of Scotland are too—about how the new Parliament will interact with all the other parts of civic society that were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East. We are concerned not about the number of Members in the Parliament, but about what it will do, which will not depend on the numbers. Apart from the safeguards necessary for proportionality and dealing with democratic deficit, the Parliament's size is not important, unless it can be shown that the Parliament cannot function properly unless the numbers are changed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that he would listen to arguments on that point—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to the Order [this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That this House disagree, with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 173.

Division No. 375] **[5.16 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*

Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Saller, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jane Kennedy and
Mr. David Clelland.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorrie, Donald
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Lords amendment disagreed to.
Lords amendments Nos. 216 to 220 disagreed to.
Lords amendment No. 1 agreed to.

Clause 18

PRESIDING OFFICER

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 9, line 28, at end insert—

("(7) The validity of any act of the Presiding Officer or a deputy is not affected by any defect in his election.")

5.30 pm

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 22, 49 to 52, 119 to 122, 130 and 221 to 234.

Mr. McLeish: This group of amendments focuses on issues concerned with the internal workings of the Parliament. I commend them all to the House.

The amendments are partly concerned with the relationship between the Parliament and the courts. We have adjusted the boundary between them to make it clear that the Parliament and those in it should be able to go about their legitimate day-to-day business without the courts being used as a means of interfering with their activities. I shall say more about that in a moment. We have also recast somewhat the provisions in the Bill dealing with the regulation of Members' conduct, to give the Parliament greater flexibility.

A further set of amendments clarifies various matters associated with the Scottish parliamentary corporate body—the SPCB. Other amendments in the group recast the provisions relating to witnesses, mainly to reflect changes in the description of legislative competence—a theme to which we shall return in a later group. Another set of amendments makes additional provision in respect of the position of political parties in the Parliament.

I draw to the attention of the House the amendments made as the result of our further consideration of the boundary between the Parliament and the courts. Amendments Nos. 2, 49, 50, 51 and 231 were welcomed on all sides in another place.

At the heart of this package is the new clause inserted by amendment No. 49, which will restrict the remedies which may be granted against the Parliament. We judge that it would be wise to ensure that no court may make an order for suspension, interdict, reduction or specific performance, or another like order. That provides a broad protection against attempts to manipulate the business of the Parliament via the courts.

We do not think that we can put the Parliament completely above the courts. For that reason, we have left open to the courts the option of making a declarator. It will, of course, be for the Parliament itself to decide how it should react to any declarator. The Parliament would not be liable for contempt of court if it merely decided to take no action to give effect to a declarator. Rather, it will essentially be a political decision for the Parliament to decide how to react in such cases. We believe that the Parliament will wish to be seen to uphold the law and in most cases would expect it to comply with any court judgment, in particular any that directly affected the civil rights of individuals—for example, a judgment concerning the legitimacy of the withdrawal of rights and privileges of an MSP.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I heard what the Minister said about the amendments being welcomed in another place, but can he tell us how the relationship between Members of the Scottish Parliaments and the courts, as defined by amendment No. 49, differs from the position in this place? Are there major differences?

Mr. McLeish: That is a fair question. Unlike Westminster, the Scottish Parliament will not enjoy the wide but ill-defined privileges accorded by article 9 of the Bill of Rights and through that, Parliament's historic position. We do not believe that we can justify conferring such wide-ranging protection on the Scottish Parliament. However—this is the nub of the matter—the Bill as originally drafted provided only limited privileges for the Parliament, principally in respect of defamation and contempt of court, leaving it exposed to possible attempts to interfere with its day-to-day business via the courts and to question the validity of its proceedings in certain circumstances. We are taking forward the issues that were raised in the Lords, as a result of which there will be significant differences between Holyrood and Westminster.

The provisions strike the right balance for a body that must be both free to go about the business of law-making while not being above the law. We have also taken the opportunity in the new clause to prevent actions being pursued by the back door, against individuals associated with the Parliament.

We have tabled amendments Nos. 2 and 231 to ensure that the validity of acts of the Presiding Officer or the SPCB cannot be questioned because of some defect in their appointment and, in particular, any defect in any parliamentary proceedings that must be followed before the relevant appointment.

Amendments Nos. 50 and 51 clarify the scope of protection provided to the Parliament in relation to contempt of court, by clarifying that, in order to enjoy the protection conferred by the Bill, reports of proceedings must be fair, accurate and made in good faith.

Amendments Nos. 5 to 14 and 232 deal with Members' conduct. The Government want to ensure that the Parliament puts in place a framework to regulate its Members' interests. Paragraph 9.8 of the White Paper indeed made it clear that there would be "minimum requirements" in respect of, among other things, rules about Members' pecuniary interests.

Amendments Nos. 5 to 14 ensure that the Parliament is under a duty to make provision for the regulation of its Members' interests. The Parliament will have to make provision for a register of interests that is published and publicly available, and for its Members to register their financial interests and to declare such interests before taking part in any proceedings of the Parliament relating to that matter.

The Parliament will also be required to make provision prohibiting paid advocacy. Previously, the Parliament was to be required to make provision for that in its standing orders. We looked carefully at that provision and considered that it could restrict what the Parliament could do. For example, the Parliament may want to make provision for a code of conduct for MSPs, which could go beyond what MSPs did in the proceedings of the Parliament. That would be outwith the scope of Standing Orders. The amendments give the Parliament the flexibility to address such situations.

Moreover, Members of another place expressed concern that provisions relating to criminal offences would be defined in Standing Orders, rather than in legislation. We felt that that was a fair point and the amendments address that concern. They provide that the Parliament must make provision by or under an Act of the Scottish Parliament—ASP. That is not to say that Standing Orders cannot be used at all in the context of provisions about Members' interests. It is anticipated that the core provisions would be in an ASP or subordinate legislation under it, but there is no reason why certain procedural matters, for example, could not be left to Standing Orders.

The provisions are intended to ensure that all MSPs work in a properly regulated framework that ensures propriety in the conduct of the Parliament's business.

Mr. Evans: We welcome the provisions of amendment Nos. 5 to 14 in clause 22. It is right that the Bill should

[Mr. Evans]

contain provision for a register of Members' interests, to ensure that the Scottish Parliament gets as fair a wind as possible. Is the register to be enforced in a similar way to that at Westminster, or will separate provision be made?

Mr. McLeish: We shall use similar enforcement procedures to those at Westminster, but build further on them. A new Parliament provides an excellent opportunity to go much further with a code of conduct and its enforcement than exists at Westminster. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman of our intention. The consultative steering group, which I chair and in which there is all-party involvement, is examining the details necessary to flesh that out. A report will be sent to the Secretary of State in December.

The key issue tonight is to ensure that that important provision is written into the Bill, so that we have the strength of the Bill behind us initially, and the Parliament is able to legislate in the future. Standing Orders and the work of my committee will ensure that the code of conduct is first class and subject to the strictest enforcement procedures.

Amendment No. 232 makes it clear that the power of the Parliament to withdraw the rights and privileges of an MSP is not restricted to those cases where an MSP is also being excluded. There may be cases where the Parliament takes the view that the limited withdrawal of rights or privileges may be a sensible sanction to deal with certain sorts of misconduct, but that exclusion would be excessive. The amendment also makes it clear that this is an area with which Standing Orders can properly deal.

Amendments Nos 15 to 22 deal with witnesses. I should explain that the ground on which clauses 23 and 24, which also deal with witnesses, were originally built has moved considerably since the clause was first drafted—for example, because of the amendments concerning the legislative competence of the Parliament that were made in another place.

In redrafting the clause to take account of those changes, we have tried to state, in ordinary language, what the Parliament may require someone to give evidence about, while preserving the general position as to the Parliament's powers in the clause as it originally stood.

The key alteration is that we propose to replace references to "devolved matters" and

"other matters in relation to which functions are exercisable by Scottish Ministers"

by a reference to giving evidence or producing documents

"concerning any subject for which any member of the Scottish Executive has general responsibility."

We think that it makes sense to use, so far as possible, language that can be given its ordinary meaning, rather than tying the provision to the complexities of "matters", "relating to" and so on.

In the House, payment to political parties is recognised as the Short money provision. Amendments Nos. 130, 233 and 234 deal with matters concerning political parties. Amendment No. 130 confers a power on Her Majesty by Order in Council to make provision for the SPCB—the corporate body—to make payments to any Opposition political party represented by MSPs in the Scottish Parliament in order to assist those MSPs in performing their parliamentary duties. That money is an expense of the SPCB and would come out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund.

It is intended that that should enable provision to be made for payments to Opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament equivalent to the so-called Short money that is provided to Opposition parties in this Parliament. That accords with the recommendation of Lord Neill's committee on the funding of political parties. It is envisaged that such money paid will be applied by the parties to obtain research and support facilities for Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen and women, assistance in the Opposition Whips office and other staff for the leaders of the Opposition parties. The amendment provides a way of providing some funding for Opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament until—this is an important point—such time as the Neill recommendations are considered fully by the Government and put on the statute book.

Mr. Dalyell: On a factual point, have all those requirements been made clear to Mr. Miralles the architect? In particular, what will he be told about the change in the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament? These are not frivolous matters and should be addressed now.

Mr. McLeish: All the considerations that are being discussed in the House and in the consultative steering group are recognised by the designers of the Parliament building, so they will be taken fully into account. As to my hon. Friend's remarks about "potential empty offices", the Parliament building will suit its purpose and provide the best deal for the taxpayers. If there are changes in the future, I have no doubt that the accommodation will be utilised properly. I correct my hon. Friend's reference to a "separate office": I think that the impression was created of a separate building for each MSP. That will certainly not be the case. The temporary Parliament on The Mound will be very tight, but there will be ample space for MSPs in the Miralles building. However, the space will not be over-generous.

Mr. Evans: We recognise that there is a need for Short money—especially now that we are in opposition. It is a recognition of the money and support that is made available to Governments. An equivalent amount of money is necessary for the Opposition to ensure the proper working of democracy. Amendment No. 130 is extremely vague. The Minister said that it will provide equivalent Short money. Does he mean that the existing Westminster formula will be replicated in the Scottish Parliament or does he envisage other provisions governing the allocation of Short money?

Mr. McLeish: I shall respond to the implication of that question: the allocation to the Scottish Parliament will certainly be no more generous, as a proportion of expenditure, than the allocation to Westminster. However, the real answer is that the matter is still being discussed. We have attempted to replicate what occurs at present. It is important to remember that it is assistance for the Opposition. It is possible that Conservative Members will participate in the Scottish Parliament, something that will add a new dimension to Scottish politics.

Amendment No. 233 responds to a point raised during debates in another place and provides that Standing Orders will be required to make provision that the Presiding Officer and deputies do not represent the same political party. When the Presiding Officer represents a political party, at least one of his deputies will have to represent another party or be an independent. We think that it is reasonable to provide that small safeguard against domination of those key offices by a single party. The Government of Wales Act 1998 already includes a similar provision. Amendment No. 234 is a technical amendment that ensures that references to political parties in the Scotland Bill are consistent.

I think that these are good amendments, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Gorrie: I seek some clarification from the Minister regarding amendment No. 130. The money is clearly intended to help the Opposition parties but, according to subsection (3), it could also help parties that are

"members of the Scottish Executive or junior Scottish Ministers".

I assume that the amendment is meant to address the possibility of coalition government. I seek some clarification on that point as an Administration might involve one, two, three or even four parties—if there were some sort of rainbow coalition. Parties co-operating in that sort of Government would still need the apparatus of Whips, research staff and so on in order to clarify their position. Does amendment No. 130 take account of that situation? Have I understood subsection (3) correctly?

Mr. McLeish: That interpretation is largely correct. In the context of the Scottish Parliament—which will introduce proportionality for the first time—there may be coalition government. Therefore, we would not have a Government and a defined Opposition as we do in this place. We are considering the question of Short money and its being reasonably well and effectively dispersed. We must also consider the new nature of the Scottish Parliament under the new political structure. Therefore, the amendment provides some flexibility in relation to that point.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 22 agreed to.

Clause 27

ACTS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Lords amendment: No. 23, in page 14, line 20, leave out from first ("of") to end of line 22 and insert

("an Act of the Scottish Parliament is not affected by any invalidity in the proceedings of the Parliament leading to its enactment.")

5.45 pm

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 24 to 33, Lords amendment No. 34, amendment (a) in lieu, and Lords amendments Nos. 35 to 48, 63, 135, 159, 235, 236 and 292.

Mr. McLeish: This group of amendments consists, for the most part, of Government amendments to the clauses concerned with the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and related matters. However, we will ask the House to disagree with amendments Nos. 32, 33 and 34, and have tabled an amendment in lieu of amendment No. 34 deleting clauses 31(1) and 31(2). With permission, I shall deal with those matters first.

Amendments Nos. 31 to 34 relate to the Presiding Officer veto. The amendment in lieu of amendment No. 34 addresses what will happen if the Presiding Officer decides that a Bill is not within the legislative competence of Parliament. Members of the other place were concerned that the Bill, as originally drafted, would mean that it was possible for the Presiding Officer to come into conflict with Parliament by allowing him to be overruled by it if he decided that a Bill was outwith the competence of Parliament. We appreciate the arguments as to why Parliament should not be brought into conflict with its Presiding Officer and so undermine his or her authority. We accept that those arguments have some force, although we believe that the concerns were overstated in the other place.

However, the amendment made in another place by the Opposition would put the Presiding Officer in a very difficult position. It would mean that the Presiding Officer would have an unchallengeable power to decide on questions of legislative competence. We think that that is an uncomfortable and undesirable position for him or her to be in, and we think that it would be an anomaly to leave the provision in the Bill. It would prevent Parliament from being able to consider a Bill that contained a provision that was outwith the legislative competence of Parliament, even if that provision could be readily deleted or amended during the Bill's passage. Such inflexibility is inappropriate.

We think that it is important that Parliament has the benefit of the Presiding Officer's views as to the competence of a Bill. We have provided that the Presiding Officer should make a statement as to the vires of a Bill. Parliament will no doubt want to pay particular heed to its Presiding Officer's views, and we think that our measure avoids the direct tension that we agree an explicit power to overrule the Presiding Officer might create. It sets up a structure that is far less confrontational and that allows room for Parliament to be advised about competence as it considers any Bill. We think that it gives the right result over all and allows disputes to be resolved in their proper place.

The Bill provides a mechanism that allows for the resolution of disputes over the vires of the Bill. If the Presiding Officer were left with the power of veto in this area, it would mean that the courts, and ultimately the Judicial Committee, could not have any role in reaching a view on questions of vires raised by any proposed Bill.

Dr. Fox: Will the Minister clarify at the outset of the debate the role of the Presiding Officer in deciding whether a Bill goes ahead for Royal Assent?

Mr. McLeish: If I may be allowed to continue, I hope that I can address that issue in the scheme of things.

We think that it is preferable in some instances to allow a Bill to be introduced so that Parliament may consider the issue that it raises. It may itself decide that something is ultra vires and reject the Bill at an early stage or it may amend the offending provisions. If there is still concern

[Mr. McLeish]

at the end of the process, the Law Officers can refer the matter to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. It is much better that those issues can be considered by the Parliament and, if necessary, by the Judicial Committee than simply providing that the Bill cannot be introduced if the Presiding Officer thinks that it is outwith Parliament's competence.

I anticipate that Opposition Members may draw parallels with procedures in this place. However, none of them really holds. What we propose is not the same as asking Madam Speaker to decide that a Bill is a Finance Bill and so should not be considered in another place, for example.

As I have explained, we are considering specifically devolution issues. Provision is made in the Bill to ensure that the courts have an opportunity to determine issues of legislative competence. That will ensure that the boundaries of the Parliament's competence are properly mapped and that a consistent body of law emerges. If we do not remove the veto that is now in the Bill, we risk the interpretation of one office holder dictating the limits of the settlement in areas where the law may be uncertain and subtle. That does not strengthen the position of the Presiding Officer. Instead, it pitches the Presiding Officer into the heart of the political situation at any one time, with no means of escape.

I take up the point made by the Opposition constitutional affairs spokesman, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). It may be useful to recap the scheme of legislative competence within the Parliament. First, the Minister makes a statement on his view that the Bill introduced by the Scottish Executive is within the legislative competence of the Parliament. That will be straightforward enough, based on advice. The Presiding Officer then makes a statement on the vires of the Bill. Parliament can decide to proceed in the knowledge of the Presiding Officer's views.

The Bill can be corrected or amended during passage through the Parliament if part of it is decided to be ultra vires. If it remains ultra vires, the Law Officers can refer it to the Judicial Committee for a ruling. The Bill cannot be submitted for Royal Assent if it is ultra vires in the view of the JCPC. The Government's proposals allow the Parliament the flexibility to deal with those matters in a mature, responsible but highly structured way. It is important that there are checks and balances. I think that that takes away the problem for the Presiding Officer and fits the Presiding Officer's role neatly into the structure of the Parliament's activities.

Other amendments in the group relate to schedule 4 and clause 28. They are designed to clarify the way in which the Bill defines the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. They also amend the powers of intervention of the Secretary of State so that they are available when legislation of the Scottish Parliament makes modifications to the law as it applies to reserved matters which have an adverse effect on the operation of law.

Given the time scale involved for right hon. and hon. Members, I propose that we make those complex changes, remembering that we are taking out the amendment from the other place and substituting in lieu positive amendments to resolve the Presiding Officer's position. Obviously, I hope that that is acceptable to the House.

Dr. Fox: This is an extremely important debate in our proceedings. When we saw the Government amendment on Third Reading, we realised that it is not exactly the debate that we thought we would have.

I go back, as I did when we considered the first set of amendments, to what the Secretary of State said at the outset. The right hon. Gentleman said on Second Reading that we would consider events against the worst possible scenario, not the best. He said that we would examine the potential for division and try to ensure that that was removed so that the devolutionary settlement could not be used to drive a wedge between the people of Scotland and the rest of the people of the United Kingdom. That has remained our position.

I worry that the Government have done the opposite of what they originally intended. Originally, the Bill provided for a double-lock mechanism which would prevent the Scottish Parliament from passing legislation that was outwith its competence. In the original Bill, as the Minister correctly said, the Presiding Officer could deem a Bill to be outwith the legislative competence of the Parliament and prevent it from proceeding in the Parliament. Although Parliament could vote to overrule that decision, the Presiding Officer could refuse to present the Bill for Royal Assent. That part of the lock at least seems to remain intact.

In the other place, the Bill was amended to remove the right of the Parliament to overrule the Presiding Officer. We agreed with that provision on the grounds that it weakened the authority of the Presiding Officer and provided a platform for those who sought to use the Parliament to advance the cause of separation by proposing legislation that would clearly be outwith the Parliament's competence.

I take the Minister's point about protecting the Presiding Officer's position. It is a fair point, but it has to be weighed against the possibility of the Parliament's being used to carry forward a legislative process that it knows it cannot take to Royal Assent. I ask the Minister to consider carefully the potential danger that that would introduce. What is open to those who want to take forward legislation that they know is outwith the Parliament's competence and use that Parliament as something quite different from what the Minister intends, which is a legislative body?

What if we have an Administration in Scotland that wants to have a Bill for a referendum on Scottish separation or a Bill to ban nuclear weapons and power stations from Scotland? That would be possible under what the Minister proposes, because such Bills could be taken through the Parliament. Although they might not receive Royal Assent because of the second part of the lock, they could take up a great deal of time. That would provide a useful platform for those who wanted to propagate such views. That is not what the Government set out to provide on Second Reading or during subsequent stages. Indeed, it is not what they argued in the other place. However, an entirely different animal is emerging, and it is strange that we get it so late in our proceedings.

With all due respect to the Minister, I must say that, in trying to protect the position of the Presiding Officer, he has moved far too far in the other direction and is creating a dangerous situation which I do not believe that the Government wanted to see. It could not be further from

the position that was outlined in the original draft of the Bill. I expect that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) will support the Government's change more than he supported the provisions in the original Bill, which worries me a great deal.

Mr. Salmond: Does the hon. Gentleman not feel or understand that the formulation put forward by the Lords, and supported by him this evening, would make the Presiding Officer's post essentially a political one? The Parliament's very first debate would effectively capture the Presiding Officer's post. It would become a sort of presidential role vis-a-vis the Parliament. Under the hon. Gentleman's formulation, those arguments would be put through the person of the Presiding Officer. The hon. Gentleman must understand that political arguments will take place. There is no legislative way in which to remove political arguments from a Parliament. It would be beneficial if political arguments were pursued on the basis of argument, and not through the person of the Presiding Officer.

Dr. Fox: There were the two mechanisms in the original draft of the Bill. There was the right of the Parliament to override what the Presiding Officer was doing. We find now that we are faced with something completely different. I am not entirely unsympathetic to the argument that the hon. Gentleman advances, but it is up to those in the Scottish Parliament to choose the Presiding Officer. It is essentially and unavoidably a political decision, and obviously that would be taken into account.

We have now lost the double lock. The Minister shakes his head; if he can answer my question, I shall be glad to hear what he has to say. I believe that we could be providing a platform for a series of Bills that could never become law because they would be beyond the legislative competence of the Parliament. None the less, they could be taking up parliamentary time. Is the Minister able to confirm that that is not so? If he can confirm that, that would be a major consolation to Opposition Members. However, I doubt that he will be able to do that.

Mr. McLeish: A sensible perspective must be applied to the debate. We are talking essentially about the role of the Presiding Officer and trying to clarify his or her role in the Parliament, which is a very important one. I think that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) raises the spectre, if we pursue part of the discussion, of a very political Presiding Officer. That is the last thing that anyone wants. That is not the function of a Presiding Officer. Certainly, the Presiding Officer will still have a role, as advocated by those on the Opposition Front Bench, in considering the question of vires. I can reassure the House that it is not the Government's intention in any way to dilute the strength of the legislative competence process within the Parliament. Indeed, if hon. Members look at the steps that I have already outlined—involving the Minister, the Presiding Officer, the Law Officers, the Judicial Committee, the Royal Assent and the Secretary of State being able to intervene if the matter that is dealt with impinges on reserved matters at Westminster—this is a serious process.

I am sorry that this is such a long response, but is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the 129 MSPs will be less responsible than we are, and less responsible than councillors operating in every council chamber throughout the United Kingdom? This is a serious business. Not only do we have a serious issue, but it is backed up by a substantial, intense process. However, tonight, we are clarifying the role of the Presiding Officer.

6 pm

Dr. Fox: I hope that the Minister will take it in the way that it is meant when I say that I do not doubt for a moment his sincerity, but that is an example of the most breathtaking naivety that we have seen since the beginning of the Bill's passage. If we are working against the worst case scenario, what if there is a majority in the Scottish Parliament composed of nationalists, separatists and their allies, and what if they want to use the Scottish Parliament, as has always been the fear in this House, for their legitimate ends, as they see it—to drive a wedge between the people of Scotland and the people of the United Kingdom? The Government are now providing them with an easier mechanism than they had before. This is the vehicle that they would like to have.

That will make it easier for Bills to be introduced—potentially by a nationalist working majority—that, under the previous formulation of the Bill, would not have been within the competence of the Scottish Parliament and therefore could not have been introduced.

The amendments are a watering down of the safeguards that we believed we had been given by the Government during the earlier stages of the Bill. They have made the worst case scenario far more likely. They have been bending backwards to satisfy nationalist opinion. It is being done under the guise of protecting the Presiding Officer's position. Perhaps it is even done genuinely in the belief that the Government are protecting the Presiding Officer's rights, but the effect is to provide a vehicle for those who want to use the Scottish Parliament as a platform for division.

Mr. McLeish: With the greatest courtesy, because I always try to pick my words carefully, let me say that that was arrant nonsense. Let us be careful about mixing political issues, in reference to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, and the technical legislative competence issue with which we are dealing this evening.

The point is simply this. We have a strengthened position because we are clarifying the role of the Presiding Officer. In the previous—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Much as I like to give leeway to a Minister when he replies, the rules of the House still apply. Perhaps the Minister can take the opportunity to wind up on the amendment.

Dr. Fox: I am not at all convinced by the argument and, as this goes on, I am becoming more and more disturbed by the fact that the Government have failed to grasp the danger that is presented to them. I hope that this

[Dr. Fox]

provision will be looked at again in another place, because a major flaw in the Government's plans is coming through.

Mr. McLeish: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I give way, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. McLeish: In the other place, this concern was not raised in the specific way that is being discussed this evening. The amendments are about the role of the Presiding Officer. Let me repeat the position very briefly. It was indeed strengthened because we have a series of steps, checks and balances.

Does the hon. Gentleman suggest that MSPs will sit day in, day out to discuss legislation that is not within their competence? I cannot accept that as a notion, but, of course, a set of steps is included in the Bill that will ensure that that simply does not happen. The hon. Gentleman should be reassured by that. I caution him against using words such as "dangerous" and "naive", because this has been a well-worked-out process and, at the fag end of the discussions in Parliament, we hear those statements being made.

Dr. Fox: It is such a well-worked-out process that we had 180-odd groups of amendments in the other place to put right the defects in the Bill. I accept that the Minister's intentions are entirely honourable, but I think that the Government have got this wrong. I simply do not believe that a nationalist majority in a Scottish Parliament would not use everything possible to try to drive a wedge between themselves and this Parliament in Westminster. If they believed that they could take through a series of Bills that they knew would not have legislative competence and could not possibly go for Royal Assent, but advanced their commitment and their campaign for separatism, they would do it.

It amazes me that any Labour politician could still be willing to take a risk on what the nationalists might be willing to do were they to get a strong foothold in a Scottish Parliament. This is a recipe for division. It removes the safeguards that we had. Why do the Government not believe that it would be better to prevent such ultra vires legislation from being aired in the first place, instead of having it messily blocked at the end of its legislative passage? What we had during the earlier stage of the Bill was a lock; what we now have is guidance.

That may be to the benefit of the Presiding Officer standing. I do not have a particularly strong position on that one way or another, but I know that it increases the danger of a Scottish Parliament dwelling on legislation that elements of the Scottish Parliament may wish to put forward for political ends, but they know could not receive Royal Assent because it is outwith legislative competence. That is made easier by this process, not harder.

Mr. McLeish: Again, with the greatest courtesy, I am trying to rescue the hon. Gentleman from the political ferment that he is trying to generate around him. The original provisions would have allowed the Parliament to decide to overthrow the Presiding Officer and continue to debate a Bill that was outwith its legislative competence, so he cannot make this great stramash and create a situation that never existed.

What we are talking about—I return to it again—is clarifying the role of the Presiding Officer, and then the whole system of checks and balances is still in place. It makes it simpler. It makes it clearer, but the central issue is this: the hon. Gentleman must not confuse political concerns about any political party with a Bill procedure that is designed to achieve the objective of having ultra vires issues dealt with at every step of the process.

Dr. Fox: The role of the Presiding Officer fundamentally changes through this alteration in the Bill because, previously, there was the ability at the beginning of the legislative process to say, "The Bill is outwith the legislative competence of the Parliament and cannot go further"—at least that was the position after the Bill was amended in the other place. What the Government now propose is that the process can be stopped only at the Royal Assent stage. That brings a whole new political complexion.

Mr. McLeish: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I will give way in a minute.

The Minister tries to draw a line between the politics of the Parliament and the procedure of the Parliament. I think that he is in grave danger of not understanding the danger that is left open here. I hope that he will think again. I will leave it to him to sum up. This major change has come very late on in the passage of the Bill. It seems to be a minor change, but it could fundamentally alter the way in which legislation is taken through the Scottish Parliament.

I caution the Government. They are making a grave error. They need to think about this matter again before someone takes advantage of a situation that they did not really intend and leaves us with the most dreadful consequences, which all of us fear just may be possible.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) is confusing two different things. He seems to believe that we can formulate a series of Standing Orders or procedural mechanisms to block political will. Not even his great heroine, Lady Thatcher, believed that. I may be doing her a slight injustice in trying to paraphrase her autobiography "The Downing Street Years", but it ran something like this: "Scotland is an ancient nation. If the Scots were ever to determine on independence, no English politician, certainly not me, would gainsay the process." The quotation may not be exactly right, but it is certainly proximate.

What the hon. Member for Woodspring seems to be saying is that, if people in Scotland determined on independence—or put a nationalist majority in the Scottish Parliament—his procedural mechanism, the blocking mechanism through the persona of the Presiding Officer, would be the ace card to defend the Union. If he actually believes that and if, first, he wants to hold out against the democratic mandate of the Scottish people and, secondly, he believes that the way to frustrate that is

by a procedural blocking mechanism, he has a great deal to learn about political reality and real politics. He also has something to learn about democracy.

I may not ever say this again, but I prefer Lady Thatcher's view on those matters and on the democratic mandate to the view now espoused by Conservative Front Benchers. I thought that, under new Conservatism and the listening to the people exercise, the days of telling Scotland what it could and could not do were meant to be over. I thought that, under new Conservatism, elements of democracy were being introduced to the party's internal procedures and, by extension, it would recognise the will and democratic view of the people. In the last 10 to 15 minutes, that whole principle has been turned on its head. We are now back to the days of "nanny knows best"—going even further than the great nanny herself, Lady Thatcher, in her autobiography.

I caution the hon. Member for Woodspring. First, he should accept democratic procedures and the democratic will of the people. Secondly, he should not believe that it is possible to devise a procedural mechanism to frustrate open and democratic political debate.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Without subscribing to the apocalyptic view of a challenge by the Scottish Parliament that goes directly against the sovereignty of this Parliament, I have some concern about the way in which the Bill, as it is now intended to stand, will operate. As the Minister rightly said, let us forget about challenges where the Scottish Parliament decides to be bloody minded and pass legislation that it knows perfectly well it does not have the necessary vires to implement. Ultimately, that would take us to the situation in Ireland in 1918, where groups of Members of Parliament detached themselves and claimed that they had sovereignty. It is an apocalyptic view and not something that I hope will happen.

Mr. Swayne: Does my hon. Friend accept that, earlier this evening, that point of view was put by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion)?

Mr. Grieve: An apocalypse may happen. I take the view that, if we get to that pass—we debated this matter at great length during other stages of the Bill—it will emerge whatever the procedural mechanisms are. To that extent, I do not think that there is much that we can do to prevent it.

My main concern is about ensuring smooth government. That implies—the Minister accepted it—that there will be areas where the precise borderline of the competence of the Scottish Parliament may be in doubt, even if there is good will on all sides. In those circumstances, prudence dictates that there should be some mechanism by which legislation, before it is introduced in the Scottish Parliament, can be subject to scrutiny.

I take the Minister's point about not placing on the Presiding Officer a burden that might politicise his position, to the prejudice of his standing and reputation for impartiality within the Parliament. That problem could be cured if there were some mechanism for reference to the courts at an earlier stage. For example, if the Presiding Officer were concerned that a piece of legislation appeared to be ultra vires, he should be able to obtain the court's opinion. We do not have that mechanism. There is a danger that people will be encouraged to believe that the Scottish Parliament has a competence to implement legislation, and then subsequently be disappointed because it does not. It is not a question of making political points about independence or what is within the scope of the Scottish Parliament; it is a matter of day-to-day realities.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is making a speech that is much more sensible than the one made from the Opposition Front Bench. Perhaps there should be a reshuffle. Was not the Conservative party's previous position that devolution made independence inevitable? "Inevitable" was the word used. Therefore, does that not make the Opposition's anxiety even more difficult to understand? Or is it something else from the previous Parliament that the Conservative party wants us to forget?

6.15 pm

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman knows that I was not in the previous Parliament. He also knows from my speeches in earlier debates that, although I want to preserve the Union and have serious reservations about whether devolution will work, I want to try to make it work. I am a Unionist, so any suggestion that I make is in the spirit of trying to make the system work.

I hope that, even at this 11th hour and 59th minute, the Minister will consider my suggestion. Ultimately, the judiciary will have the final say on the legislative competence of both this House and the Scottish Parliament; so, unless there is a mechanism by which prior reference on a matter of serious doubt can be made before legislation is introduced, people are likely to be disappointed. Also, time is likely to be expended and prove fruitless.

Mr. Gorrie: There are three positions on this issue. There are the first thoughts of the Government as included in the original Bill: that the Speaker of the Scottish Parliament could say that a Bill was not for discussion, but the Parliament could then vote to overrule that. The second position is that taken by the House of Lords: that the Speaker could make such a ruling and the Parliament could not overrule him. The third is the Government's second thought: scrub the whole issue. That is an intelligent second thought.

Earlier, in the debate on a previous amendment, I was greatly encouraged when, almost for the first time in a debate on Scotland, we had some intelligent Conservative speeches and interventions. I am afraid that, since then, the Opposition Front Bench has reverted to the old gramophone record. It is not realistic to expect a Parliament not to debate something that it wants to debate.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Throughout time and across the globe, democratic bodies have had limits on their competence and, therefore, limits on the matters that they may rightly consider. It is a nonsense to confuse procedure and politics, as the hon. Gentleman must know from his experience in local government. There are limits to debate based on competence. That is not an unreasonable practice in a sound democracy.

Mr. Gorrie: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. My experience of democratic bodies is that they debate

[Mr. Gorrie]

all sorts of things. A council can debate whether nuclear weapons are a bad thing, or that Iraq is a bad place. It knows that it has no power over those matters, but it can debate them.

Dr. Lynda Clark: The hon. Gentleman may be confusing debate and legislation. There is obviously a big difference between debate that does not lead to legislation and debate that does. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would consider that.

Mr. Gorrie: The hon. and learned Lady anticipates my argument. I am not totally stupid, although I say it myself.

We will not stop a body debating. The Conservative argument is that it is wicked for a putative Scottish Parliament with a putative majority for independence to discuss a Bill about independence. My point is that it can discuss a motion saying that it would be very nice if Scotland were independent. Everyone agrees that that would be intra vires. If it were a Bill, it could be ultra vires. We cannot stop the Scottish Parliament discussing whatever it wants to debate.

The Government's second thought is sensible because to set the Parliament against the Speaker would be a bad thing. One of the important aspects of the Westminster Parliament is that, if Madam Speaker tells me to sit down, I do so and there is no messing about. If I had just previously in the Scottish Parliament voted to overrule a Speaker's ruling, that would diminish the power of the Speaker and might cause trouble in Parliament.

Dr. Fox: Self-evidently, a Parliament can debate anything that it wants to debate. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Dr. Clark) was correct to say that there is a difference between a subject that the Parliament might debate and subjects on which it might legislate. We are talking now about the Parliament's legislative competence. What would be the point of the Parliament embarking on the process of legislating on a subject in which it knows that it has no competence, and to create legislation that it knows, ultimately, cannot receive Royal Assent?

Mr. Gorrie: The hon. Gentleman answers his own question. If the Parliament has any brains, it will not go down that path. It is ridiculous to contend that the Union will somehow be destroyed if the Scottish Parliament considers a Bill that is ultimately said to be out of its powers, whereas, as everyone agrees, it is within the Parliament's powers and causes no problem for it to debate and pass motions on the very same issues. It is ridiculous to make such a distinction.

If the Parliament wants to discuss an issue, it will discuss it. If the Parliament knows very well that a Bill will never be passed because it is ultra vires, it would only bring itself into public disrepute by continuing to try to pass it. Even if I were elected to the Parliament and were stupid, there would be 128 other people with more brains than me, who would not do such daft things.

Dr. Fox: That is the precise worry. If I were a separatist, I would want to pursue a legislative path that would bring the Parliament into conflict with Westminster, thereby creating as much of a public fuss as possible. That is the exact recipe that nationalists seek, and it is exactly what the Government are proposing. There is a huge difference between debate and legislation, which is why we are trying, in schedule 5, to limit the Parliament's legislative competence. The Government's proposals make it more likely that the provisions could be abused by those who want only greater division.

Mr. Gorrie: The hon. Gentleman has lived for some time in the Conservative party and therefore sees life as one huge conspiracy, but I do not see things in that way. The Parliament will be responsive to public opinion. It is ridiculous to suggest that Members of the Scottish Parliament would deliberately waste lots of people's time voting on matters on which they cannot legitimately vote. They will be allowed to debate and air issues, get their headlines in newspapers and their soundbites on television because of motions and other absolutely legal means.

Mrs. Laing: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, procedurally, there is a big difference between a debate or a motion designed to air views on a subject and introducing a Bill—which is what Conservative Members have been talking about? The Parliament's procedure on introducing Bills is the matter that could drive a wedge between the Bill's provisions and the will of the future Scottish Parliament

Mr. Gorrie: I do not accept any of that. Politicians want their soundbites, their appearances on television and their headlines in newspapers, and they will get them regardless of whether they are debating a motion or a Bill. If Members of the Scottish Parliament introduce ultra vires Bills that everyone knows will not be allowed to reach fruition, they will only subject themselves and their party to ridicule, which they will not want to do. The entire basis of Conservative Members' argument is therefore absurd, and shows their party's total divorce from reality.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gorrie: No; I have gone on long enough, as have all the objections.

Mr. Swayne: Having had some optimism over the summer months, I am now filled with the forebodings that filled me in our previous debate on the Bill. The entire matter seems now to have the potential for going off the rails. Despite the common ground that was established in the previous debate on both sides of the House—with the possible exception of those on the Treasury Bench, and one or two other Labour Members—the gulf between us seems to have re-opened. I shall take the risk of being accused of playing the same old gramophone record by saying that it all boils down to an issue that, time and again, we hammered out in the Bill's Committee stage: the issue of good will, and the Bill's reliance on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to remember that we are debating a Lords amendment. He should confine his remarks to that amendment and not speak about the Bill in its entirety.

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) has drawn attention to the need for

good sense. Conservative Members are not persuaded that good will will be enough. We want to maintain the Lords amendments as they are—as they would ensure that the procedures will act to prevent such problems from arising, rather than having to rely on good will.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend for giving way. On the matter of precedents of ultra vires in local and other authorities, does he agree that, contrary to the comments of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie), most democratic institutions are limited in what they can pass into legislation—for want of a better term? As the hon. Gentleman said, one may have a debate on any matter. However, as the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Dr. Clark) said, legislating is a very different matter. The problem with the Government's proposals is that they create the potential for debate not on broad matters of academic importance but on legislation. That is the key to the matter.

Mr. Swayne: I agree with my hon. Friend—although I should correct him on his nomenclature in referring to me. His comments seemed to be absolutely elementary.

Mr. Hayes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The nomenclature that I used was "hon. and gallant Friend". I believe that my hon. Friend is a serving member of the forces. Was I incorrect in that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The title used to be reserved for use in addressing those holding gallantry awards. I do not know whether the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) holds a gallantry award.

Mr. Swayne: Although I wish that I did hold a gallantry award, the sad fact is that I do not, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I share the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and believe that there was much sense in what he said. Unfortunately, we are not considering a Bill or an amendment establishing the type of structure that he favoured. We are offered the Bill with either the Lords or the Government amendments, and I tell the House that I prefer the Lords amendments.

Let us just consider the possibilities. Let us suppose that daft or stupid—as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West suggested—Members of the Scottish Parliament, whatever their motivations, introduced Bills in the Parliament to ban nuclear weapons on Scottish soil, for example, or to provide more generous social security provision in Scotland. Both measures might be very popular, and proceeding on them in the Parliament might offer great scope for making political capital. However, doing so would be ultra vires.

I think that it would be much better to have that inevitable political argument and battle at the outset. Everyone agrees that we cannot keep politics out of the matter and that the Parliament will discuss what it will discuss regardless of the rules. Nevertheless, it is better to have the battle at the outset, as the Lords amendment would provide, than to let the matter run its course and to have the battle at the end. Although a battle at the outset would politicise the position of the Presiding Officer, it would be better to let his office take the strain and be politicised. The effect of letting him take the heat of taking the decision will be to give the impression that the Scottish Parliament has limited itself in consideration of the topic. To do it the other way round, and to let a measure proceed through the Parliament until it is finally ruled ultra vires, would give the very different impression that Westminster had thwarted the will of Holyrood, rather than that Holyrood had limited itself according to the law. That is a key difference and it is preserved by the Lords amendments. We should agree with the Lords in that.

6.30 pm

Dr. Fox: To put it in a nutshell, does my hon. Friend agree that it makes nonsense of schedule 5 and the division between reserved and devolved powers for the Parliament to follow a legislative process that cannot be completed because it is beyond the legislative competence of the Parliament? Does that not make a mockery of what we have been doing over the past months?

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend is exactly right. It would be a monumental waste of the Parliament's time to go down that route. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West was quite right to say that it is an outrageous proposal that would bring the Parliament into disrepute. However, if the Parliament were debating populist measures, I am not sure whether public opinion would move in exactly that way. I agree entirely that the waste or exploitation of the Parliament's time in that way should be ruled out by the procedures at the outset, in accordance with the terms of the legislation of vires and ultra vires that we have spent days and weeks discussing.

Mr. Syms: We all know that, when private Members' Bills are introduced in the House, public expectations go up. We receive lots of letters as if the measure were about to become law, although as legislators we know that it will not. Is there not a great risk that, if the Scottish Parliament introduces legislation in areas where it does not have competence, that will have the same effect of building up a great deal of public support for something that cannot possibly be achieved?

Mr. Swayne: There is certainly that danger. The build-up of public support, far from bringing the Scottish Parliament into disrepute as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West suggests, will have the effect of bringing this Parliament into disrepute. That is why it is so important to put procedures in place so that the vires is ruled at the start of the procedure and not at the end of it. That is particularly important.

Labour Members have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that the Scottish Parliament will discuss what it will discuss. That is true in debate, but it must not be allowed to pertain to legislation being put through the Scottish Parliament. If it did, it would make utter nonsense of the schedules that we have considered and all our debates on what should be devolved and what should not.

Mrs. Laing: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) who has most eloquently expressed the crux of the argument. If the Government's motion to disagree with the Lords amendment is carried, it will make nonsense of all the hours that we have spent discussing schedule 5 of the Bill and the Bill itself. It will have been a complete waste of

[Mrs. Laing]

time discussing which matters should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament and which should be retained by Westminster.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) argued very strongly—I will allow him to correct me if I am wrong—that the Scottish Parliament should have the power to vary the matters over which it has competence. If it is up to the Parliament to decide which Bills are introduced, if it is up to the politicians to decide on the popular matter for discussion of the day, and if it is up to the MSPs at the time to decide whether that matter can be discussed or legislated on, he is effectively saying that schedule 5 is incompetent, that it might as well not exist and that we might as well not have spent many days discussing it.

Mr. Gorrie: May I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the rest of clause 31 which it is not proposed to remove? It sets out all the blocks affecting any legislation going through the Scottish Parliament. Her remarks amount to hyperbole that bears no relation whatever to the facts.

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman is correct in referring me to clause 31, but I disagree with his interpretation. Under clause 31 all that would happen is that, after a Bill had completed all its stages in the Scottish Parliament, a decision could then be taken that the Parliament did not have competence over that subject and therefore could not pass the Bill. That is precisely what will make a nonsense of the proceedings of the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Lady is so concerned that she has wasted her time on schedule 5, why did she and her party not object to the clause that says that, notwithstanding everything else, the Westminster Parliament can always overrule the Scottish Parliament whether or not it has legislative competence? Why did she not concern herself with that clause?

Mrs. Laing: Would it surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that I consider that the most important clause in the Bill? It is vital that that clause be observed because the Scottish Parliament will derive its power from Westminster, just as it derives its power from the Bill which will be passed by this Parliament.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Lady is saying that, notwithstanding her previous argument about the importance of schedule 5 and working out where she thinks the Scottish Parliament should have legislative competence, she would reserve her right to interfere with the Parliament even in matters where it had legislative competence. Is that her position?

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman is making my argument for me extremely well. The crux of the argument is that the matter that we are discussing will serve only to drive a wedge between the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament. I appreciate—so must the Minister—that the hon. Gentleman wants to do exactly that. It is the hon. Gentleman's political agenda because he wants a separate Scotland. If the legislation that we are discussing results in the Westminster Parliament and the Scottish Parliament coming head to head in an irresolvable argument about the competencies of the two Parliaments, it will be more likely that the people of Scotland will become disenchanted with devolution.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Lady has put her finger on the fact that I support an independent Scotland. However, she is having difficulty in understanding that I do not deceive myself into believing that a procedural mechanism one way or the other will be the subject on which independence is either successful or unsuccessful. It is about politics, not procedure. Does the hon. Lady give me that?

Mrs. Laing: No indeed, I do not. I see exactly what the hon. Gentleman is saying about procedure. Of course it is not the procedure but the way in which it is used. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) spoke about MSPs being stupid. I think that was the word he used—*[Interruption.]* I do not wish to misquote the hon. Gentleman but he is not correcting me. He was suggesting that some people may not understand procedure.

If I may pay a compliment to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan—I have already become unpopular by paying a compliment to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), and I like to keep these things balanced—he is an extremely competent political operator and he knows exactly how he will be able to use the very procedure that we are now discussing. Of course democracy is not protected by mere rules. It depends on how people use the rules. The hon. Gentleman knows how to use the rules to his political advantage and I do not want him to gain that political advantage.

Mr. Hayes: Is not the compliment that my hon. Friend has paid to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) tempered by the fact that his problem with the ultimate sovereignty of this Parliament is that he had hoped that the Scottish Parliament would be a federal Parliament—and probably still hopes that? It will be a devolved Parliament, and in a unitary constitution—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Please sit down when I am standing. We are going wide of the amendment and the intervention is also far too long.

Mrs. Laing: I appreciate the basic point that my hon. Friend was making. The important fact about the Scottish Parliament is that it will derive its power from this Parliament and the Bill that is being passed through this Parliament.

Mr. Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that we have already had a fine example this evening of action that the Scottish Parliament may take that would be out of its competence—the issue of the number of Members of the Scottish Parliament? The Scottish Parliament might introduce a Bill to ensure that there were more MSPs than had been allowed by the Bill, with representation equal to Westminster's. Under the Government's proposal, the Scottish Parliament would be able to debate the issue and only at the end of the process, after the vote had been taken, would the process be stopped. That is a great danger to the proper working of the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Laing: My hon. Friend is right. It would also be a great waste of time for the Scottish Parliament. I am

concerned about how Scottish taxpayers must feel when they hear about what the Scottish Parliament will do, how many members there will be and how the number will be changed—starting with 129 but then going down to just over 100 because we do not really need 129. Scottish taxpayers must be worried about what the Scottish Parliament will do and what the many highly paid civil servants will do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us not worry about what the Parliament is going to do. We have specific amendments before us.

Mrs. Laing: I shall adhere strictly to the amendments. If we agree with the Government this evening, we might as well not have had schedule 5. All the rules that have been laid down at great length by the House and our parliamentary process will have been for nothing. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and his colleagues will be only too happy to continue to drive the wedge that he has spoken of this evening between the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament. That will doubtless be the effect if the hon. Gentleman has his way. I shall not embarrass him by repeating my compliment that he is a clever political operator.

Mr. Syms: My hon. Friend is making a persuasive case. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) talked about procedural mechanisms. Are not constitutional arguments all about procedural mechanisms?

Mrs. Laing: I agree that procedural mechanisms are an important part of the political process. If we do not have well laid out procedural mechanisms—this is what the amendment is about—it will not be clear what is intra vires and what is ultra vires. That is one of the most important rules of constitutional law. If we do not have clear rules, there will be constant squabbles about what the Parliament can do. Only lawyers will benefit from that situation, because they will earn large fees for deciding the arguments. I declare an interest because I am a lawyer and I have no objection to lawyers earning large fees, but taxpayers should be protected from that.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is developing a powerful case. I am not a lawyer—I say that as a matter of pride. I recognise that my hon. Friend cannot penetrate the mindset of Ministers, but does she think that the Government can have any credible reason for wanting to create a situation that would allow the Scottish National party to whip up anti-English hysteria?

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The comments of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) have nothing to do with the amendments, so the hon. Lady should not respond. I remind her that there is such a thing as repetition—I shall not go as far as to say tedious repetition. She has made her case on the amendments. To keep repeating her arguments would not be fair to the House.

Mrs. Laing: I conclude from your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have made my point and I am happy to rest my case.

6.45 pm

Mr. McLeish: I apologise for the long interventions early on. This has developed into a nearly interesting filibuster. I had hoped from previous debates that the Conservative Opposition were recovering and rehabilitating themselves in the aftermath of defeat in May 1997, but they have gone back to their bad old ways and their tired old arguments tonight. I had high hopes for the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) after her Front-Bench appearance in Committee. The Conservatives cannot distinguish between hysteria surrounding the political interpretation of what is happening in Scotland and the cool, measured view required to look at the legislative process and the issue of competency.

The role of the Presiding Officer—the Speaker of the Scottish Parliament—is at issue. The suggestion of the other place would give the Presiding Officer unchallengeable power to decide on questions of competence. That would escalate his involvement, giving him a role described by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) as essentially political. That is not the role of Madam Speaker and her deputies in this House and it should not be the role of the Presiding Officer and the deputies in the Holyrood Parliament. We have tabled considered amendments that would remove the potential for conflict in Holyrood. The Presiding Officer would be allowed to state a case about vires, but the case would be part of a structured set of checks and balances on legislative competence.

I hope that the Conservatives will take cognisance of what is happening in Scotland. There is no prospect of the scenario that they have come up with being part of the Holyrood scene.

Mr. Dalyell: Could we be clear whether there has been recruitment of Clerks for the Presiding Officer? I gather that Mr. David Millar has been recruited. What is the position of the expert help that any Presiding Officer would need? That ought to be in place before the elections.

Mr. McLeish: The work of the expert panel on procedure is part of the consultative steering group. A lot of detailed work has been done on the points that have been made. An initial appointment has been made. I take my hon. Friend's point seriously. We want to ensure that all the relevant advice will be available after 6 May next year, when the Parliament starts. I assure my hon. Friend that that will be in place; it is a major part of our current considerations.

I want the Conservative party cooly to examine what is proposed for Holyrood. First, the Bill is about reserved competencies for Westminster and devolved competencies, so already a decision has been made on what we should be making laws on in Scotland and what should be kept in this place. Secondly, within the consultative steering group—which contains a Conservative representative—we have agreed to have pre-legislative scrutiny, which does not exist in Westminster.

I challenge the Opposition to consider a situation where all that is incompetent because it is ultra vires. Let us return to the real world—just for a small amount of time, because concentration can be difficult. Let us imagine that we have the devolved responsibilities, which we take

[Mr. McLeish]

seriously, and pre-legislative scrutiny before a Bill even arrives in Holyrood. We will then have a situation where a Minister with responsibility for education or for local government comes before the House and says that the proposed legislation is within the competence of the Parliament. The Presiding Officer will then make a statement at Holyrood on the vires of the Bill. At every step, is it conceivable that the Parliament—subject to the scrutiny of the press and the public—can be breaking laws day in, day out in terms of legislative competence? That is an absurd proposition from the Conservatives.

After the Presiding Officer's statement, the Parliament can decide to proceed in the knowledge of the Presiding Officer's views. However, the Bill could then be amended and the offending part that was not within vires could be taken out. If it remains ultra vires, the Law Officers can refer it to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The Bill cannot go for Royal Assent if it is ultra vires in the view of the JCPC. There can be no more structured set of procedures in any Parliament in the world. It is sensible because it will be a serious Parliament with enormous law-making potential, and it will be responsible for £15 billion.

The Opposition must confront reality and start to trust the people. Are we suggesting that the Members of the Scottish Parliament elected by the Scottish people on 6 May next cannot be trusted to make laws that are within the competence of the Parliament? That is the absurdity of the Opposition's approach tonight. They are going back to their old ways and, frankly, it does their perception in Scotland no good at all.

Dr. Fox: The Minister says that we are proposing an absurd set of conditions. It is, truly, an absurd set of conditions if we are dealing with rational politicians who want to make the Parliament work. However, if we are dealing with a Parliament in which the majority of politicians do not want it to work because they have an alternative political agenda which is quite different from that of the mainstream Unionist parties represented in this House, that is a problem.

In the first draft of the Bill, we had a double-lock—a lock right at the outset where there was, through the Presiding Officer, the ability to stop a Bill. However, that does not exist now—either through the Presiding Officer or anyone else. Why have the Government taken that out of the equation?

Mr. McLeish: To coin a phrase, "Game, set and match". The hon. Gentleman has shown the Opposition's fear of what the newly elected group of 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament will do in the new Parliament. I have painstakingly gone through the procedures to provide the checks. The Opposition are simply not listening because they do not want to listen. They have put forward a set of absurdities.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): The Minister said that the Opposition did not believe that the Scottish Parliament—or the individual Members, once elected—would be competent to carry out its duties on behalf of the people of Scotland. I do not believe that that is in any way the case. Surely the question is whether the Government were competent in their proposals for the powers of the Parliament, because when the matter was put before the Scottish people, no details as to what the powers and the definition of the Parliament would be were given. In other words, any question of lack of competence rests on the shoulders of the Government of whom the Minister is a part.

Mr. McLeish: We have had 185 hours of debate in this Chamber and the other place on the Bill. Before that, a number of us became familiar with the White Paper, which was well discussed in Scotland and set out the powers and competencies of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish people signed up for that in a referendum with two ballots. The hon. Gentleman's proposition is not tenable—he is attempting to find a gold nugget in a complex area.

Tonight, we have set out genuinely and honestly what is happening with the Bill. There is a thorough set of procedures which the Opposition cannot distort and undermine by confusing politics with practicalities. I do not believe that their case stands up and I believe that what we have is robust and will be taken seriously by Scots in the Parliament. I believe that we will have good law making in Holyrood.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 24 to 31 agreed to.

Clause 31

SCRUTINY OF BILLS BY THE PRESIDING OFFICER.

Lords amendment: No. 32, in page 15, line 38, leave out ("subject to subsection (2)").

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. McLeish.]*

The House divided: Ayes 350, Noes 119.

Division No. 376] **[6.56 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor

Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Durnwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gedsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine
(Morecambe & Lunesdale)
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Hanson and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bourn'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mr. Tim Collins.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 33 and 34 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 32 to 34 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 35 to 52 agreed to.

Clause 41

THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Lords amendment: No. 53, in page 19, line 5, at end insert—

("(3) A person who holds a Ministerial office may not be appointed a member of the Scottish Executive; and if a member of the Scottish Executive is appointed to a Ministerial office he shall cease to hold office as a member of the Scottish Executive.

(4) In subsection (3), references to a member of the Scottish Executive include a junior Scottish Minister and "Ministerial office" has the same meaning as in section 2 of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975.")

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 54 to 62, 64 to 87, 123, 124, 131, 147 to 151, 170 to 173, 288, 293, 297, and 298 and a motion to disagree.

Mr. McLeish: This large group of technical amendments deals with a wide range of matters, including prohibition of dual mandates, the resignation of the Lord Advocate, the validity of Acts of Scottish Ministers, consultation requirements under clause 51, the sharing of powers under clause 52, interaction with the Human Rights Act 1998, the transfer of property, agency arrangements, the definition of "the Crown" and official secrets. I urge the House to accept the amendments; we will, of course, oppose any attempt to disagree with amendment No. 298.

I understand that Opposition Members are interested in amendment No. 53, which prevents members of the Scottish Executive—which, for the purposes of the clause, includes junior Scottish Ministers—from holding office in the UK Government. The amendment provides that a person holding ministerial office, as defined in section 2 of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 may not be appointed as a member of the Scottish Executive and that, if a member of the Scottish Executive is appointed to ministerial office, he shall cease to hold office as a member of the Scottish Executive. It also makes it clear that the term "member of the Scottish Executive" in this context includes a junior Scottish Minister.

I also understand that Opposition Members are concerned about amendment No. 298, which provides that members of the Scottish Executive and junior Scottish Ministers are Crown servants for the purposes of the Official Secrets Act 1989. It is important that the House appreciates what that does and does not mean. The Official Secrets Act does not always get a good press, but it plays a useful role in enabling the exchange of information within Government, which is why we tabled the amendment.

Amendment No. 298 will ensure that Scottish Ministers are put in exactly the same position as Ministers in the UK Government. It will also put them in the same position as their staff, who will of course be civil servants and, as such, Crown servants for the purposes of the 1989 Act without the need for any amendment. That is all that the proposal is about—it will mean that Scottish Ministers will be able to receive and, if necessary, disclose information covered by the 1989 Act while also being subject to the offences created by the Act.

The Government consider that the amendment is necessary so that Scottish Ministers can carry out their duties to the full. It will mean that there is no anomaly in the position of Ministers as against their civil servants in respect of access to information. We would rightly be criticised if we bequeathed that anomaly to our successors. I hope that hon. Members will recognise that and support the amendment.

7.15 pm

Mr. Evans: As the Minister said, the amendments are wide ranging and largely technical, but my primary concern is amendment No. 53, which deals with the dual mandate. We have been asking for such a measure for some time and we believe that the amendment is straightforward and sensible. It recognises that, if devolution is to mean anything, there must be a clear break between those who hold office at Westminster and those who are part of the Executive in the Scottish Parliament. Devolution will mean nothing if the Scottish Executive regularly have to sing to the tune of the Westminster Cabinet.

We know that the Government are still suffering from their control-freak tendencies in every other matter—we saw examples of it only this weekend—but at least they have recognised the stupidity of allowing a two-jobbing politician to have a face, let alone feet, in both camps. That politician's voice would be, by its very nature, the voice of the Westminster Government. A Minister who held positions at Westminster and in the Scottish Executive would necessarily be bound by collective Cabinet responsibility and by what Downing street said.

Will the Minister say whether he believes that a politician can serve two masters? If someone cannot be a Minister both in Scotland and at Westminster, why do the Government believe that someone can be part of the Executive in Wales but also part of the United Kingdom Government? Indeed, someone can be both First Secretary in Wales and Secretary of State for Wales. If the measure in the amendment is right for Scotland, why is it not right for Wales? If a person can serve two masters in Wales, why have the Government tabled this amendment to the Scotland Bill? The people of Wales and of Scotland will be interested to hear the answer to that question.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I speak to the motion, which I tabled with my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), to disagree with Lords amendment No. 298. The Minister has claimed that the Bill is carefully thought through and balanced and that it was constructed as a whole. It was always intended that the Government of Wales Act 1998 should impose on Assembly Members the Official Secrets Act 1989. The measure was wide ranging and subject to some discussion. The House agreed to an amendment of which I did not approve.

As regards this Bill, however, amendment No. 298 was parachuted into the House of Lords. The measure did not appear in statements to the Scottish people and was not discussed by the Scottish Constitutional Convention or—as it was not originally in the Bill—by the House of Commons. Moreover, there was almost no discussion in the House of Lords of the propositions underlying such an important concept. Indeed, those who spoke welcomed or even acclaimed the measure. We all too often accept the conventional way of doing business.

For certain classes of information, the Official Secrets Act makes what we regard as matters of confidentiality the subject of a criminal offence in respect of Government servants and Ministers of the Crown. Other than the Minister's explanation today, no one has said why that is necessary. We are not suggesting that the security of the state—of our island Government or even of Scotland—is at issue, because that is a reserved matter for this House. No one has advanced any argument why it is necessary to impose the criminal law on Members of the Scottish Parliament, as a precondition of election.

I want to test the proposition, because it seems strangely contradictory to the thrust of the Government's intentions on freedom of information, of which I am all in favour. We hear talk of the new politics of openness and the new dispensation in Scotland, yet the Official Secrets Act is being imposed without reasoned thought. Why is it necessary? Is it because a Minister may be too candid with the Parliament or because the Scottish people are not sufficiently grown up to participate in the debates that form public policy on non-reserved matters?

To take a very sensitive issue, if someone were to come into possession of a piece of information about Dounreay that could touch deeply, or even lethally, the lives of UK citizens resident in Scotland, disclosure would be a criminal offence. How can we have a fully informed, proper public debate without the availability of, and access to, information?

The Government agree with me, to the extent that they published one of the most extraordinary White Papers that the country has ever seen: "Your Right to Know". The Prime Minister, no less, wrote a foreword saying how important it was. The original draft of the Bill was in that spirit, inasmuch as it did not extend the use of the Official Secrets Act by what I will argue is the very wicked device of including it here rather than amending the primary legislation.

Why was it necessary to introduce a provision that has at no stage of the process been drawn to the attention of the Scottish people, in the name of whom the Government claim authority for the legislation?

We have not heard any reasoned arguments. The Minister has merely said that matters of confidentiality require a criminal offence, but that is not borne out when we consider the scope, authority and ability of the Scottish Parliament to make law on matters that do not touch on the security of the state. We may prevent proper consideration, with a full, mature adult population participating in public policy. How can we make informed judgments without a flow of information?

I believe our system of government—our constitution and the ways of its workings—to be profoundly good, but one of its sins is that it has for most of this century been dependent on the most extraordinary tool of repression of freedom of discussion: our legacy of section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911 and 1920. That is what is at issue.

The new politics that the Labour party espoused so bravely on day one seems to have withered on the vine, as we still have no freedom of information Bill, despite many promises. I thought that, in that open climate, Scotland would be relieved of something that inhibits informed public debate. It is often said that Governments do not mind freedom of expression, because by and large

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our prejudices are simply not informed, but that they fear equality of information, because that allows people to argue on an equal basis about the right course of action.

I believe that the measure is wholly inappropriate, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East. Unfortunately, he could not be here today, but he asked me, as we are both true-born Scots, to express that view on his behalf.

Mr. McLeish: I acknowledge the expertise and interest of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) in these matters. My arguments are not so sophisticated. We want consistency, so that our access to the Official Secrets Act is consistent with that of Westminster Ministers. I believe that that is right. That is my core point, although I acknowledge that there is a wider argument about why others might construe that as stifling proper dialogue with the public and as preventing what I believe that the hon. Centleman described as a mature debate in Government.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we are a Government who believe in freedom of information, even if we have not got as far as he would like. I hope that the new Scottish Parliament will enter into that spirit and, more important, participate in the development of freedom of information.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Both my hon. Friend the Minister and I have an interest in these matters, because we both hope to be elected to the Scottish Parliament. I am worried by the point that the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made: he painted a scenario in which, if I were to table a question to my hon. Friend in the Scottish Parliament, he could be prosecuted for giving me an answer. That is a terrifying thought. It would be useful if my hon. Friend could clarify the point, because I am sure that that is not the intention.

Mr. McLeish: In my judgment, the system works for the Westminster Parliament. We want to take that set of conditions and apply it at Holyrood. Because of a wider range of issues with which he is concerned, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills does not think that we should do that. I have argued simply from the premise of consistency.

Scottish Ministers may become aware of matters covered by the Official Secrets Act. Making such Ministers Crown servants gives them the protection of section 7 of that Act, which can be invoked if the disclosure is made in accordance with their official duties. I believe that our proposal is simple and straightforward, providing consistency and good government and giving us the necessary basis for debate on some sensitive issues.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I have great respect for the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and his expertise in these matters, but I think that he is being too alarmist. Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that Back-Bench Committees in the Edinburgh Parliament will have the right of access to material when they cross-examine Ministers on policy and other matters?

Mr. McLeish: In the spirit of my original explanation, that will be the case. We are talking about a Parliament that will make real laws and scrutinise the Executive on real live issues. We should not create a pretence that the Scottish Parliament will be any less stringent or intense in scrutiny than we are at Westminster.

We should keep matters in perspective. There is nothing terribly sinister in what we are attempting to do at Holyrood in comparison with what happens at Westminster. My speaking notes could fill volumes of *Hansard*, but I would rather provide the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills with a detailed written response in which I can set out the full background. I have tried to cover the substance of his point this evening.

Dr. Fox: I am not sure whether the Minister intends to return to amendment No. 53. In case he does not, I should not let the moment pass. He has told us about the change that is being made, but why did the Government choose to include in the Bill the provision that a Minister of the Crown cannot serve in the Scottish Executive?

7.30 pm

Mr. McLeish: I was going to return to that point, but I wanted first briefly to respond to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) has raised what might be called the Welsh factor, although this is a Scottish debate. There is no mystery in why we have acted as we have. We are dealing with the devolution of primary legislation to Scotland, and we simply cannot have Ministers who are both members of the Scottish Executive and Ministers of the Crown at Westminster. The Welsh Assembly will be responsible not for primary legislation, but for subordinate legislation, and that distinction is important. Once the Holyrood Parliament is set up, the Scottish Executive and Members of the Scottish Parliament will get on immediately with their business. In Wales, I expect there to be a considerable amount of liaison during the first few months of the Assembly. I do not want to stray on to Welsh business, but it may be that Ministers at Westminster may also populate the Welsh Assembly in some capacity.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister says that the Scottish Parliament must get on quickly with its business. If there are to be Committees, they must be serviced, and they must be serviced by skilled people. What arrangements have been made to provide skilled assistance? The skills required are somewhat rare, as the activity is a specialist one. Has the provision been thought through?

Mr. McLeish: There has been an enormous amount of discussion about that point. We are setting up a Parliament and specialist Committees, which will, for the first time, combine legislative and scrutinising functions, and we know the level of expertise required. Work is being done with the consultative steering group, and we are recruiting staff. I shall write to my hon. Friend to detail what has been done to tackle his specific point.

Mr. Evans: I have no doubt that the Scottish Parliament will want to get on with business, as will the Welsh Assembly. The amendment is right, and we wanted it all along. If devolution is to mean anything, it is inconceivable that a Minister in the Scottish Parliament could also be a Minister at Westminster. Collective responsibility means

that that could not work, as devolution would not function properly. Does the Minister, for the sake of consistency, accept the principle of amendment No. 53, which is that to have a two-jobbing Minister at Westminster and at either the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly simply would not work?

Mr. McLeish: The final stages of the Scotland Bill are no forum for discussion of the Welsh Assembly. We are responding to the situation in Scotland. The amendment is straightforward, and it is important. It would not be wise for me to comment on other Bills, or on an Assembly with which I have no involvement.

Dr. Godman: My question is prompted by the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Specialist advisers are important, and provision must be addressed. As one who will not sit in the Scottish Parliament, may I say that many new Members will have none of the experience of cross-examining Ministers that most Members at Westminster gain through the Select Committee system? I hope that some attention will be given to the guidance of new MSPs.

Mr. McLeish: The new Parliament will contain a smattering of experience, but my hon. Friend has a point. We will embark on training relating to the nuts and bolts of Parliament and the whys and wherefores of Committee work. The consultative steering group has set up expert panels on technology, procedures and the media, and some of the most distinguished people in the country serve on those panels. We have not simply waited for the Parliament to be established. We have made a serious attempt to build up to the point at which Members who are elected can get quickly on to business and have the expertise at their disposal to do so properly and effectively.

Mr. Shepherd: I want to clarify one point. To whom will a civil servant in Scotland owe his or her first duty of allegiance? Will it be to the Secretary of State, who sits in the Westminster Parliament?

Mr. McLeish: The civil service is a unified service, but the first call on civil servants in Scotland will be from the First Minister.

Mr. Shepherd *indicated dissent.*

Mr. McLeish: If I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman's question, I apologise.

Mr. Shepherd: With whom does a civil servant's first duty lie? The Minister says that the first duty in Scotland is to the Scottish Minister. However, Crown civil servants within a unified service clearly owe a duty to the Crown at present, through the Secretary of State for Scotland, in the United Kingdom Parliament. Who will be their master?

Mr. McLeish: Clearly, the civil service will remain a unified service, but civil servants working in Scotland will work through the First Minister to the Crown. They will swear allegiance in the same way as Ministers at Westminster. The process is not complex.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 54 to 87 agreed to.

Clause 89

APPOINTMENT AND REMOVAL OF JUDGES

Lords amendment: No. 125, in page 42, line 37, leave out ("making such a nomination") and insert

("nominating persons for such appointment")

Mr. Dewar: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 126 to 128, Lords amendment No. 129, amendments (a), (b) and (c) in lieu.

Mr. Dewar: I ask the House to agree to Lords amendments Nos. 125 to 127, but to disagree to amendments Nos. 128 and 129, to which there are amendments in lieu.

Amendment No. 125 has been much discussed at various times. It is odd that it has caused so much excitement. One would get the impression that we were in the habit of knocking down judges as if they were ninepins. In fact, I know of no attempt, at least in modern times, to remove a judge from office in Scotland. There have been occasional cases of resignation as a result of difficulties or special circumstances, but no attempt has been made to force out a judge. I do not expect that it will be a common occurrence in future, either. Indeed, so uncommon is the occurrence that, in drafting the Bill, the matter emerged as a gap in the law of Scotland. There is no provision for sacking a judge in Scotland; no one thought it necessary to have such a provision because no one had ever wanted to do such a thing. Perhaps that is a tremendous tribute to the quality of our judges; I say that in an even tone.

There is a distinction between judges and their more fallible brethren on the shrieval bench because there is machinery for the removal of a sheriff. In my long memory, which is now very long, I can think of two occasions on which that machinery was implemented. On both occasions, for very different reasons, the gentleman concerned left the bench. For judges, the matter has not come up and it has never been felt that there was a great need to deal with the issue. If it has caused much trouble, it is a rod that we made for our own back by trying to fill the gap in the interests of completeness. I stress that, while I regard it as important that we get it right, I regard it as likely to remain—I hope that no one misunderstands me—a somewhat academic exercise.

The Bill was amended in another place to provide for a tribunal composed exclusively of senior judges, with membership restricted to Lords of Appeal in Ordinary and holders of high judicial office who were either Members of another place or Privy Councillors. It was proposed that those persons should be given the task of reporting the case for removing a judge and so acting, to use a term of art, as gatekeeper to the whole process. That was suggested because it was felt that the proposition in the Bill was not entirely satisfactory. The Bill simply proposed that a judge

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could be removed on a vote of the Scottish Parliament with a two-thirds majority, not of those voting but of the entire Parliament. That was meant to be an important safeguard, because it would be unlikely, particularly given the voting system that we have introduced, that one could succeed in removing a judge without putting together a coalition that covered several parties.

Mr. Dalyell: Has the Secretary of State consulted the Lord President of the Court of Session and the Lord Justice Clerk about safeguards? It would be of great importance if they have said that they are satisfied with the safeguards. What is their attitude?

Mr. Dewar: Before the amendments were tabled, there was discussion with the Lord President, Lord Rodger, and I understand that he was satisfied with our proposals, as the Opposition appeared to be when we outlined our intentions on Third Reading in another place. We are well equipped with support in this instance.

I found some of the arguments prayed in aid of the amendments moved in another place a little excitable. I say that with respect to a close personal friend of mine for whose intellectual capacity I have great respect. I refer to Lord McCluskey who, to put it in lay language, got the bit between the teeth to some effect. I was entertained to discover that the proposal for removal on a two thirds majority of the Parliament was

"a constitutional monstrosity . . . the greatest threat to the independence of the Scottish judiciary since the eighteenth century",

and a threat to democracy itself. I felt quite important because I did not realise that I was a constitutional Genghis Khan, dealing death and destruction all around. I was pleased to discover that Lord McCluskey rightly emphasised having everyone equal before the law and said magisterially—or, indeed, judicially, in manner at least—that that principle applies to

"Donald Dewar, the Earl of Elgin, and the Governor of the Bank of Scotland."

That was odd company in which to find myself.

I mock Lord McCluskey gently because I have great respect for him and realise that he had a genuine concern. Some of the arguments pushed the boat out a little far. He said:

"if the judges are not independent, if they can be sacked by the Government when the Government doesn't like the way they are deciding cases, the courts quickly degenerate into becoming tools of the executive, and democracy is dealt a fatal blow."

I hope to reassure him that, whatever the nuances of the argument, and however the balance should fall, no one who has been engaged in it imagined that we would be dealing with a situation where the Government would sack someone because they did not like the way in which that person was deciding cases. Of course, that would be a very serious matter indeed. I do not think that that would have arisen, but he is entitled to say that we must deal with the worst case scenario and that if we are to fill this lacuna in the law, we should do it adequately and with care. I am happy to endorse that.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The Government's amendment (c) states:

"Provision shall be made for a tribunal".

It is not clear whether such provision will be made ad hoc in response to a particular issue arising in respect of a particular judge or whether it is general. Will such provision be made soon so that it is in existence to deal with circumstances as they may arise?

7.45 pm

Mr. Dewar: Our proposition is that we should broadly follow the procedure for removal of a sheriff. There should be a gatekeeper.

Mr. Hogg: Perhaps the fault is mine for not putting my point sufficiently clearly. I do not understand whether the provision will be made only if a particular case arises or whether it will be made generally so that it is always available to deal with circumstances that may never arise.

Mr. Dewar: That is an interesting point on which I shall no doubt get some advice. My view is that it will only arise when there is a need. I presume that the tribunal will not be a standing body. If it is, I might apply for the secretary's job, which I hope would carry suitable remuneration while being lightly worked. It would be the last sinecure, going back to Lord McCluskey's 18th century.

Mr. Hogg: I am pleased to make provision for the Secretary of State's retirement and future employment but I think that we are dealing with rules for the composition of a tribunal rather than setting up a tribunal. I am seeking to discover, so far unsuccessfully, whether the tribunal and rules will be set up to deal with a particular case or whether, early in the lifetime of the Parliament, general provision will be made to deal with a case that may or may not arise.

Mr. Dewar: May I say with beguiling honesty that I understood the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point perfectly but did not know the answer to it. I have been rescued from that predicament and I understand that the intention is that a tribunal can be set up as cases arise. It is not necessary to set up a standing body because we anticipate that it would be used rarely, if at all. There is no need to have it in permanent limbo, waiting for a client who never comes.

Mr. Grieve: In the amendment from the other place, the tribunal's form and structure are clear because they are defined. The Government's amendment is more nebulous and leaves much more room for interpretation. It is on that point that the Opposition seek clarification because the tribunal's composition is crucial.

Mr. Dewar: On that point, I have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman. As we are running towards the end of the Bill, I should say that I am delighted to see him yet again in his place. As an expatriate, he has stayed the pace remarkably well and given me much entertainment in recent months—and not many Conservatives do that.

Dr. Fox: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No—let me answer the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), because he has raised a serious point. We intend to stipulate the qualifications of the

chairman, but we are not attempting to stipulate the entire membership of the panel—the individual members who may be called to their posts many years hence. Clearly, I assume that the panel will carry credibility, comprising people of expertise and standing—the sort of people who can offer genuine advice about a difficulty that has arisen in respect of judges of the Court of Session and the chairman of the Scottish Land Court, who has the same status as a judge. I do not think that we should try, in an ad hoc body, to stipulate a curriculum vitae that must be met, or a definition that has to be honoured. To allow a degree of flexibility makes sense.

Mr. Grieve: I am much obliged to the Secretary of State for half answering my next question. He clearly accepted that the amendment made in another place had some substance; otherwise, presumably, the Government would not have embarked on something similar. Therefore, my next question is to seek clarification as to why he felt that the form of the tribunal as proposed in another place was unsatisfactory.

Mr. Dewar: We anticipate that the panel will be judicially led in terms of its chairmanship, but not that it should be entirely or necessarily appointed from the ranks of the judiciary. When setting up a panel to deal with difficult circumstances pertaining to an individual judge, there is some merit in that approach. Judges do not come in crowds in Scotland: they tend to know each other and have long-standing connections and knowledge, which can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is important that there should be flexibility in the composition of the body that is called into being to look at a specific case. Nevertheless, we are anxious that the tribunal should be headed by a figure whose qualifications and knowledge are reassuring, and that is why we have stipulated the qualifications for the chair of the tribunal. These are difficult issues to balance, but I believe that ours is a sensible proposition.

Dr. Fox: The Secretary of State will understand that the target audience and acute readers of the clause will look for answers to the questions in rather more detail than most of us would care to delve. Will he confirm that my understanding of what he said to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg)? The Government amendment (c) states that "'Provision'"—that is, provision for the tribunal—

"means provision by or under an Act of the Scottish Parliament".

Therefore, it is intended that primary legislation will give overall form to the tribunal, and that any subsequent action would be taken through secondary legislation. Is that a correct reading of the right hon. Gentleman's intentions?

Mr. Dewar: I am not sure whether I followed that exactly, but no doubt others have done so and will advise me. We are trying to provide an impartial machinery to give advice to the Scottish Parliament should the unfortunate circumstances that we are debating crop up. I believe that we should all have an interest in that aim.

The intention is that the Parliament can make general provision in respect of the dismissal of judges, including the arrangements for appointing the members of the tribunal and its rules and procedures. The Government amendments give the Parliament the flexibility that would not be available if the Lords amendments remain. The Lords amendments are prescriptive, whereas we are trying to allow a degree of—I was about to say room for manoeuvre, but that sounds somewhat shady, so I shall not adopt that phrase. We are trying to broaden the base, bearing in mind the need for suitable candidates who will command the confidence of everyone, including someone who might be the subject of investigation or consideration by the tribunal.

Dr. Godman: Is there a right of appeal in respect of a decision taken by the tribunal?

Mr. Dewar: The decision is taken by the Scottish Parliament. The recommendation of the tribunal has to carry a majority vote in the Parliament, and I doubt that there is any formal appeal from that. However, the procedure is extremely special and would give all those involved in it pause for thought. I have only been involved in one similar case: I shall not go into details, but it involved a sheriff. At that time, I was shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, and the then Secretary of State invited me to come and see him in his room. The procedure was taken extremely seriously, even though, I regret to say, that there was no controversy about the matter. No one should imagine that such cases will be taken lightly, either by the Scottish Parliament or by anyone else.

The Bill provides a minimum framework—we are not trying to cross all the t's and dot all the i's—but we have always assumed that the Parliament will be able to choose, if it so wishes, to add to the framework by enacting further legislation. That is the point to which the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) referred. The removal of judges is not only a matter of private concern for the judges, but an issue of serious public interest. There is a legitimate debate to be had, into which Lord McCluskey entered with enthusiasm and, in so doing, threw up some interesting ideas. However, it is not always wise to leap to a conclusion either way during the final few days of a Bill's passage through Parliament.

The key point is that clause 89 is entrenched. The Scottish Parliament will have to live with what it says and will have no scope to replace any of its provisions; it will be able only to expand on them. That is why the essential safeguards should appear in the Bill, but the fleshing out and the determination of the final mix of experience and standing on the tribunal is a matter for the Scottish Parliament. We think it right that the Scottish Parliament should have that element of discretion, so that it can develop the procedures that apply in Scotland for the removal of judges.

The Government's alternative amendment to Lords amendments Nos. 128 and 129 therefore provides simply that provision shall be made—which, in this context, means provision by or under an Act of the Scottish Parliament—for the First Minister to constitute a tribunal of at least three persons to investigate and report on the case for the removal of a judge. Three is a minimum number and not a prescriptive figure. The amendment ensures that the chairman will be a person eligible under clause 94 to be a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The First Minister still requires the Parliament's approval before being able to recommend to

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Her Majesty that a judge be removed; but he may not seek that approval unless the tribunal has reported that the person is unfit.

We are giving the tribunal a key role, which is an important safeguard against the possibility of a Scottish Parliament taking a political dislike to a member of judiciary and attempting to act in the manner of Charles I during the 17th century. I believe that such circumstances are unlikely to occur, but I concede that I cannot exclude the possibility of their occurring in future years. That the chairman has to be eligible to be a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council gives us a reasonably wide choice of distinguished legal figures, whose number currently includes several extremely distinguished Scottish judges.

The tribunal's report must be laid before Parliament. Given the addition of a statutory tribunal to the process, we see no need also to require the two-thirds majority. Having included in the Bill the body that has to report and without whose say-so the matter cannot proceed, we saw no reason to overburden the machinery by demanding the high test of a two-thirds majority; therefore, the amendments in lieu remove that test. We have retained the provision that, where the person who may be removed is either the Lord President or the Lord Justice Clerk, the First Minister must also consult the Prime Minister. We have been properly tender of the feelings of the judiciary. Some might accuse us of having been over-tender, but it is better to make it clear that the fears that have been expressed are not real.

I said in reply to an earlier remark by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that the Lord President has been involved and, it would be fair to say, taken an active part in correspondence and discussion about the Bill's final formulation. He has helpfully put forward his opinions on this and other matters.

The proposals to some extent reflect the existing provisions for sheriffs under the Sheriff Courts (Scotland) Act 1971 and are therefore tried and tested.

Mr. Dalyell: Do we take it that there is no dissent from what is proposed from any of the senior judges? I am prepared to believe that there is no dissent, but I should like it to be stated on the record.

8 pm

Mr. Dewar: I cannot pretend that I have discussed the matter with all the senior judges, but the Lord President has been consulted. The judges are collegiate; the Lord President is the leader and has a duty to reflect their opinion. I am not aware of any dissent on the matter. While strolling in a park in Edinburgh at the weekend, I had the advantage of having a discussion with Lord McCluskey. *[Interruption.]* I felt very safe in judicial company. I do not want to misunderstand his position, but I got the impression that he was at least mollified, and on that I rest my case.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, there is no reason to fear for the future independence of the judiciary. If there were a risk of political interference, building a tribunal, even on the lines that we are proposing or those agreed in another place, would not stop a tyrannical Administration who were determined to bulldoze their way through judicial independence. They would probably not find it too difficult to bulldoze their way through the committee as well. I do not imagine that that will happen, and we have made proper provision to build in safeguards that I hope will be deemed adequate.

I listened to some hon. Members saying that the proposals were the end, if not of the world, at least of judicial integrity. We should consider that south of the border, since the Supreme Court Act 1981—the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) will be aware of this, being a man learned in the law—a judge can be removed on a simple majority, admittedly of both Houses of Parliament, with no committee, panel or judicial inquiry. I find that position a little puzzling, although I recognise that there are important differences that no doubt justify it.

I accept that it is possible to argue that the House of Lords is such a bulwark of individual liberty and such a collection of people of integrity, expertise and skill that it was not necessary to have people to investigate the facts and reach an opinion that a recommendation could safely be made. However, judging by the fierce expression of the need for a safeguard and a proper inquiry into the individual case, I would have suspected that hon. Members would have wanted to amend the 1981 Act, but there does not seem to be a great enthusiasm for doing so. That is a matter for those who have a particular responsibility for the machinery south of the border.

We have properly listened to the fears that have been expressed, but I hold to my belief that there is no danger of abuse. I accept that, if those fears are even voiced, there is a case for including safeguards and ensuring that we all go home, if not happy, at least satisfied.

Mr. Evans: The Secretary of State rightly said that this issue has made many people excitable, and I suspect that I am at the Dispatch Box because it was thought that I was the most appropriate person to deal with the issue.

It was heart warming to hear the Secretary of State speak so highly of the other place as a bulwark within Parliament. I look forward to his contributions in a similar vein in the next Session when we shall discuss in more detail the qualities of the other place. The Bill has led us to consider the importance of the second Chamber because of the way in which the legislation has been improved by the amendment tabled by Lord McCluskey and the fact that the Government have reconsidered the matter and tabled their own amendment.

I have read Lord McCluskey's contributions in the early hours of 7 October in the other place and on Report on 2 November, when he was forced to call a Division. He had the support of two serving Law Lords, four retired Law Lords, one serving Court of Session judge—Lord Cooke of Thorndon, the retired chief justice of New Zealand and a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council—and two former Lords Advocate. When someone of Lord McCluskey's stature is able to command the support of such individuals, it is only right that we take his amendment seriously.

We are discussing the independence of the judiciary, which I am sure Members on all sides of the House hold in high regard, especially when we are considering the establishment of a new body. We need to get that absolutely right. The fact that it is dealt with in the Bill means that attempts are being made to ensure that the

integrity of the judiciary will be upheld. The fact that the Government have tabled an amendment reveals that they are coming some way towards accepting the fears expressed by Lord McCluskey and others.

The removal of senior judges is a serious issue, and we must ensure that the practice continues to be rare and that it is fair and open and complies with our other obligations under the European convention on human rights and the Latimer house guidelines for the Commonwealth, which approve the Harare principles, about which Lord McCluskey so eloquently spoke in the other place. The Harare principles state:

"In cases where a judge is at risk of removal, the judge must have the right to be fully informed of the charges, to be represented at a hearing, to make a full defence, and to be judged by an independent and impartial tribunal. Grounds for removal of a judge should be limited to

a) inability to perform judicial duties

b) serious misconduct".

Article 6 of the European convention on human rights states:

"In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law".

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who is not in his place, was trying to establish with the Secretary of State that the tribunal would be impartial and independent. I hope that the Secretary of State will say a few more words about that.

Although the Lord Advocate stated in another place that it would be beyond belief and inconceivable that judges would be removed at the whim of fancy, judges will increasingly be involved in matters of political controversy. I am sure that the Secretary of State has, as I have, read many newspaper articles about the wisdom of some of our judges in their deliberations and decisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) spoke earlier about worst case scenarios, and when we are passing legislation we should ensure that it is as watertight as possible and that we prepare for all eventualities.

I understand that the Secretary of State for Scotland hopes to achieve great heights in the Scottish Parliament. I am sure that he would never stoop to such base, earthy instincts as populist rhetoric, and that he will observe the high standards that we associate with him in his present capacity. However, others—possibly others not too far from him—may hold that new position. We should put in place safeguards and guidelines that everyone will have to follow.

We seek a fair and sound structure for the removal of judges, which separates political considerations from the initial assessment of unsuitability. That was the aim of the McCluskey amendment. An independent tribunal established by law would be the most appropriate way of achieving that. Lord McCluskey pointed out that, since 1877, it has not been possible to remove a sheriff without an independent inquiry by senior judges set in train by the Lord President and the Lord Justice Clerk.

The Faculty of Advocates stated that

"the tenure of judges should remain such that they cannot be removed from office other than on the basis of fitness or misconduct, and that this should be expressly stated in the legislation . . . it is necessary to have some means of determining the fitness of judges that is independent of the political process".

That is what we are seeking this evening. The value of the work that has been done in another place is demonstrated by the fact that, until now, the Government have been opposed to writing that into the Bill and accepting the proposal for some form of tribunal to examine the unsuitability of judges before the matter goes to the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Dewar: Speaking from the Opposition Front Bench, the hon. Gentleman puts tremendous stress on the need for a judicial investigation rather than a general debate in Parliament. Is he happy with the present situation in England?

Mr. Evans: If the matter had not appeared in the Bill, I expect that it would not have been raised because it would have been on an equal footing in Scotland and in England. Because it is written into the Bill, it is the subject of debate today and was taken up by Lord McCluskey.

The Secretary of State mentioned that the two thirds vote of Parliament would no longer be required, and that a simple majority of the Scottish Parliament would be sufficient. I welcome that. Lord Mackay of Drumadoon in the other place outlined the problem that would arise because of that extra lock. Not only could the matter go before a tribunal, but a majority of two thirds of Parliament—not just two thirds of those voting—would be required. That would mean that, if the majority of MSPs, but not quite two thirds, voted against the judge, it would put him in an impossible position. Therefore, I welcome the fact that the simple majority has been introduced.

I have three questions for the Secretary of State. First, is the Government's reluctance to accept the full changes proposed by Lord McCluskey due to the fact that they wish the Scottish Parliament to lay down the procedure, building on the changes in the Bill? Does he see that as a process, rather than the destination?

Secondly, the provision for the tribunal is left more open than in the McCluskey amendment. We are not certain of the full numoer of tribunal members. We know that there is a minimum of three and that the chairman will have the high regard of everybody, but we do not know about the other members. Would it be possible for members of the tribunal to be Members of the Scottish Parliament or even Members of Parliament at Westminster? If the intention is to separate the political and the independent aspects of the deliberations, some people might be concerned if MSPs and Members of Parliament could sit on the tribunal.

Thirdly, will there be changes to the procedure for removing sheriffs and sheriffs principal, who will also be involved in devolution issues?

8.15 pm

Mr. Wallace: I welcome the Government's stance following Lord McCluskey's amendments in another place. I share the Secretary of State's view that Lord McCluskey couched his arguments in pretty apocalyptic terms, but by over-egging the pudding, he at least got some pudding—bread and butter pudding.

We debated these matters when the Bill was previously before the House. My recollection is that the purpose of the provisions was to give some structure to the ways in

[Mr. Wallace]

which judges could be dismissed. I understand—no doubt I will be corrected if I am wrong—that, until that point, it was unclear how Court of Session judges or the chairman of the Scottish Land Court could be dismissed. The intention was to put a procedure in place. The two-thirds majority was meant to give security to the judiciary. Motives that never existed were attributed to the Government for that, but the opposite was the case.

We now have a better procedure. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), speaking from the Opposition Front Bench, shied away from the question whether the provisions for England were satisfactory. I suspect that they do not meet his international test of the convention on human rights or the Harare principles. The Government may have to revisit the matter to rectify the position in England.

The amended Bill will provide suitable machinery if the issue ever arises. I assume from what has been said that the tribunal could include lay people. That is welcome. The House will recall that, during the passage of the Bill, we proposed the inclusion of lay people in the appointment of judges. It might be appropriate if lay people, as well as senior members of the judiciary, were involved in a tribunal to assess their unfitness.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): The hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that one of the points that Lord McCluskey made in another place is that, in order to judge those issues, it is important to know how the judiciary operates. He proposed in an amendment that the tribunal should consist of past or present members of the judiciary, who have such knowledge. Surely it would be wrong for those decisions to be made by lay people, who may not understand why a judge made a particular decision in a particular case.

Mr. Wallace: Under the amendment, the chairman of the tribunal would have to be a person who had held high judicial office, so a crucial position in the tribunal will undoubtedly be filled by someone equipped with judicial knowledge and the judicial approach. It is almost inevitable that other members of the tribunal would be members of the judiciary.

However, it is not unreasonable that there should be the possibility of a lay person being appointed. If, for example, the question at issue was the psychiatric condition of the judge concerned, it might well be thought that a leading psychiatric doctor—a person with the appropriate medical expertise—could make a valuable contribution to the tribunal. That is speculation, but I welcome the possibility that the tribunal could include a lay person.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for letting me come back into the debate—that is generous of him. Suppose the issue that was causing concern about a judge was that he had made a decision about the vires of an Act of the Scottish Parliament, and suppose that was a highly controversial matter in Scotland. The chairman of the tribunal might take the view that the judge had made a perfectly sensible decision on the law, but the two lay people on the tribunal might be incensed by the issue, and might argue that, although the decision was acceptable legally, they did not agree with it. That occasionally happens in an industrial tribunal, albeit on a slightly different issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please be brief?

Mr. Heald: I will be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) comment on whether the provision may lead to dangers?

Mr. Wallace: The tribunal will be constituted only at the request of the Lord President; so there is a judicial trigger. The circumstances in which a decision is made—

Mr. Evans *rose—*

Mr. Wallace: I must answer the question raised by the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald). If the trigger for constituting the tribunal is unhappiness about a judicial decision, that does not pass any test of inability, neglect of duty or misbehaviour; therefore, the question simply will not arise.

Mr. Grieve: I believe that the hon. and learned Gentleman is mistaken. He said that the Lord President would be the trigger, but, in fact, the tribunal may be constituted in such circumstances as the First Minister thinks fit. There is provision for the Lord President not to be involved in that decision.

Mr. Wallace: I was about to turn to that issue as I assumed that, in such a situation, we might call the ability of the Lord President into question. Will the Secretary of State confirm that that is what he had in mind? That is a hypothetical question, and I make no reference whatsoever to the incumbent, who is fit in many respects to hold that high office.

I agree also with the removal of the two thirds majority. The provision was proposed as a safeguard and, with the creation of the tribunal, it is no longer necessary. I agree with the hon. Member for Ribble Valley, who said that it would be intolerable if the tribunal recommended that a judge was unfit to hold office and that decision was subsequently overturned by Parliament. I think that we have struck a good balance. I sincerely hope that the mechanism will never need to be activated but, if it does, I think that we have struck the proper balance between protecting the judiciary and upholding its integrity.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): I join the Secretary of State in hoping that these cases will remain entirely hypothetical and that the measures will never have to be implemented in practice. I hope also that it will never be necessary—in the words of the Secretary of State—to "knock down judges like ninepins". However, the Bill must provide for even the most unusual circumstances. Therefore, we must ask how best to do that in the interests of justice and democracy, while allowing the new Parliament to take its own decisions in its own way.

There is widespread agreement that some form of independent tribunal is necessary to investigate the behaviour of any senior judge who faces the threat of dismissal. My party believes that neither of the two

alternatives before us this evening fully fits the bill. The amendments introduced in the other place by the noble Lord McCluskey would create a tribunal of the great and the good, which could be accused of involving an old boys' network of peers, judges and Privy Councillors in the decision making. However, I think that the Government's amendments are equally at fault in ensuring a central role for a judicial member of the Privy Council as the tribunal chairperson.

The Government have clearly sought to compromise with their amendment but, as with most off-stage deals, the result fails somewhat to make the grade. Why cannot the details of the proposed tribunal be left to the Scottish Parliament? Why must those restrictive provisions appear in the Bill? My party favours opening up the procedure for appointing judges through a judicial appointments commission. That would bring the fresh air of democratic scrutiny to the procedure. Such a body could also play a role in the investigation of misbehaviour or incompetence that is required before the removal of any senior judge.

In contrast, the new Scottish Parliament will have its hands tied by both sets of amendments. It will be unable to create a tribunal that it believes will be the most effective and suitable body. We must instead have a body conjured up by the Government in the short time since their defeat in the House of Lords. The Secretary of State may like to detail his discussions and consultations with the legal profession on his proposal in order to allow the House to judge whether the tribunal is born out of hasty compromise or genuine consideration. With whom has the Secretary of State spoken and whom has he consulted in the short time that has elapsed?

The Scottish National party certainly oppose the Lords amendments, but we remain to be convinced by the Government's alternative proposal before us tonight.

Mrs. Fyfe: Listening to the debate, it occurs to me that the grounds for considering a person to be unfit for office certainly include inability, neglect of duty and misbehaviour. However, when a judge is occasionally criticised in the media, that usually has more to do with the social attitudes that he has adopted in conducting a case or deciding a sentence. "Inability" may be narrowly defined in the Bill or it may cover a wide area. If it simply means incompetence, that would not apply in the situation that I envisage.

I am concerned that judges are often criticised very strongly—and sometimes correctly—because of the social attitudes that they display in their handling of court work, which places them in the last, rather than in this, century. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State offer his thoughts on that point?

Mr. Grieve: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for explaining the way in which he has approached the amendments. The amendment before us has great merit. However, two aspects cause me slight concern. In this place, we tend to knock politicians excessively on their ability to be objective. Nevertheless, it seems to be undesirable that a member of the initial tribunal may also vote subsequently to ratify that tribunal's recommendation. To that extent, it seems inappropriate for a member of the tribunal also to be a Member of the Scottish Parliament that subsequently carries out the ratification process—not because such a person is a parliamentarian, but because an independent tribunal that is acting as a gatekeeper should be seen to be composed of different people from those who subsequently vote to ratify its decision.

That is the only extent to which I disagree with the way in which the Secretary of State has approached this matter. I am certainly reassured by the fact that, broadly speaking, he has suggested that the members of the judiciary north of the border are happy with the proposed arrangements. I do not wish to digress too much, but I believe that the Secretary of State makes a perfectly valid point when he says that the arrangements south of the border may have to be reviewed.

I had always understood—although I stand to be corrected—that no mechanism exists for removing the judiciary north of the border before this legislation, because of an indirect consequence of the Act of Union 1707. Protecting the Scottish independent judicial system meant that the United Kingdom Parliament never saw fit to interfere with the process for fear it would be suggested that it was interfering with the wording of the Act of Union.

It may be an interesting by-product—I pay tribute to the Secretary of State, who made some kind remarks about me earlier—of this constitutional development that certain logjams in the way in which Scotland has been governed by virtue of the ring-fencing in the Act of Union will henceforth be more open to scrutiny. That is one matter where the Secretary of State may claim some credit.

I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would consider my points about the undesirability of the person who serves on the tribunal also subsequently ratifying its recommendations. Save for that, the Secretary of State has satisfied me on the Government's approach.

Mr. Syms: I feel somewhat more reassured than when I sat down earlier this evening. I agree with the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). One of my main concerns is that the tribunal could include a Member of the Scottish Parliament who, at a later stage, could have a second bite of the cherry by influencing his or her colleagues to vote to remove a judge. Lord Mackay of Drumadoon asked whether we ought to preclude the appointments of MSPs or Members of Parliament whose motives might be called into question—even if we are all honourable Members. It is sometimes better to be seen explicitly not to be involved in such issues.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) made the important point that, sometimes, the problem is caused by the attitudes of judges, rather than their conduct. I think that that is partly why the issue has become so explosive, not only in the other place but during this debate. It is important to get the issue absolutely right.

8.30 pm

One or two other points were raised by Lord Mackay. The First Minister should be under an obligation to lay the report of a tribunal before the Scottish Parliament but only if he intends to proceed with the necessary motion to remove the judge. It would be preferable for the tribunal to be set up by an Act of the Scottish Parliament rather than by subordinate legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned that.

[Mr. Syms]

Another issue raised has been partly answered by the interventions of my hon. Friends earlier. It is said that the Government will not accept the proposed changes because they wish the Scottish Parliament to lay down the procedure for the tribunal so that they can refine it in the near future. I think that we had an answer, and the answer is probably yes.

It has been said that it is unfortunate that the provisions do not apply to sheriffs and sheriffs principal because they, as well as judges, will be involved with devolution issues. However, I feel somewhat reassured by the debate and by the assurances given by the Secretary of State. The Lords, as always, have done us a favour by bringing these matters to our attention and enabling us to consider them again and perhaps come up with the right conclusions.

Mr. Dewar: I have listened with interest to what has been said. This is one of those happy occasions when there are few discordant notes, although the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh) has done his best. I think that he has been reading the somewhat remarkable press release issued today by one of his colleagues under the rather intriguing headline

"Roseanna calls on Commons to reject McCluskey amendments".

I presume that we shall be expecting a vote in only a few minutes. Those who are not aware of who "Roseanna" is will think that we are in the business, perhaps, of glasses, globes and tents and foreseeing the future. In fact, "Roseanna" turns out merely to be a Scottish National party member, the hon. Member for Perth (Ms Cunningham), which is much less romantic.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Angus. As always, he could not quite rise to the flood of excitable invective which he promises when he rises in his place. I shall put that right by quoting one passage from the "Roseanna" press release. It reads:

"The amendments put forward by Lord McCluskey would plunge us into the unsustainable and anti-democratic position of allowing the old boys' network an effective veto on attempts to dismiss senior judges."

I pay tribute to the nationalists, who are clearly prepared to go out on a limb on this matter. It is nice to know that the rhetoric of "unsustainable and anti-democratic" and so on is a banner still being carried bravely even in the fag end of the debate.

I say to the hon. Member for Angus—perhaps I should take his point a little seriously—that there is a case for a judicial commission that is broad based in terms of the appointment of judges. It is not necessarily one that the House would want to support, but it is one for which there is a strong argument. However, that is rather a different matter and different remit from a body that is being asked to look into the particular circumstances that might lead to the dismissal of a judge. The two matters are not necessarily linked and I think that it would be unwise to link them. I hope that, on mature reflection, particularly as the hon. Gentleman appears to be the only nationalist in the Chamber, he will decide not to divide the House, otherwise he might find some difficulty in running between the Lobbies and his arithmetic might not quite stand the strain.

I shall deal with one or two other points comparatively briefly. Self-evidently, we are trying, with the support of almost all the House, to put in place machinery that allows proper discretion to rest with the Scottish Parliament in due course but provides for the essential safeguards that were felt necessary in another place, which I think enjoy a broad element of agreement.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) raised one or two specific points and some were picked up by his colleagues. I think that they felt that they had to do their duty. It is the oldest game and I played it for 20 years. One drops in on the debate, listens to what is said from one's Front Bench and then repeats it. It is a perfectly fair way of proceeding, particularly if someone is looking for a career.

Mr. Wallace: It clearly worked.

Mr. Dewar: It works.

We were asked whether we need to adapt the current machinery for sheriffs. The answer is quite clearly not. The sheriff procedure is being imported into the procedure to deal with the dismissal of judges. As I said earlier, their position is rather different from that of judges. Unfortunately there have been cases where sheriffs have had to be removed. In at least one case, a great deal of litigation has surrounded the proceedings. A panel has to sit to examine the matter and be satisfied. The matter is then brought to the House, where a majority is required. Those are robust and in-place proceedings and we certainly would not see any need to abandon them, particularly as we are, in effect, almost extending them.

Mr. Evans: I understand that there is precedent for the removal of a sheriff. I am aware of the time that it sometimes takes to do it. I think that, in one instance, it took a year. Can we be assured that, in the removal of judges, with the procedure that will be set in train, there will be a given time by which the exercise will be completed?

Mr. Dewar: We cannot give that assurance. That is not in the Bill. I suppose that the Scottish Parliament might decide to put in some sort of time limit but I think that that would be unwise. At what point should a time limit start running? It could be a matter for perhaps endless debate. I think that it is the spirit of the House that, if those unfortunate circumstances arose, proper and careful inquiries should be made. Presumably, it would be agreed that they would not be hurried. If anyone were involved, including obviously and inevitably as chairman a senior judge, he or she would have in mind at once the need to make thorough and proper inquiry, and also the need to remove the shadow over the colleague who in practice would probably be suspended. In a sense, he would not be actively engaged in work as a judge. He would obviously be entitled to get a decision which clarified his position one way or the other. That is a matter for proper and careful process and not for arbitrary time limits.

The matter was raised of the people who would serve upon the committee. I have made the point that I think that it is a matter for decision by the Scottish Parliament. We would certainly not want to rule out fairly broad representation if suitable people of standing and integrity had particular skills to offer in particular circumstances. I think that that is the sensible way in which to proceed. Obviously, the person who will chair must be eligible to be a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy

Council, and to take part in the proceedings over any question of vires. That means that they are not going to be over 75, which seems a good rule on the whole. As I approach 75, I might take a different view, but, at the moment, I think that that is sound.

The point was made, and I understand it, about whether we should be prohibiting Members of the Scottish Parliament from serving on the committee. The way that the question was actually put, I think, was whether parliamentarians could serve, or Members of Parliament. Self-evidently, Members of the United Kingdom Parliament could serve. Many of the people who are qualified to be chairman are likely to be life peers, or to have a seat in the House of Lords, and therefore be members of Parliament at UK level.

The question arises whether we should specifically prohibit Members of the Scottish Parliament. I do not think that that is necessary. I cannot envisage circumstances in which someone who will vote in the final decisions would be likely to be chosen or put on such a tribunal, as that would be, or could be, open to criticism. That is very unlikely to happen, but we should not start to rule out unsuitables, because we would never end. Should we specifically rule out anyone who, for example, at any time had served in the same chambers as, had a business relationship with, or was related to, the person in question? Common sense rules those people out. The same matter would self-evidently apply in this case.

The sort of people who will chair the tribunal will obviously be people of great weight. To quote a few of the likely candidates—if per chance this were brought into effect in the foreseeable future—Lord Mackay of Clashfern, Lord Cameron of Lochbroom, Lord Jauncey of Tullichettle, Lord Rodger of Earlsferry and Lord Hope of Craighead are likely to look a little askance if, having been appointed chairman, they found someone manifestly unsuitable or open to criticism among the membership of their panel. There are plenty of ways in which that situation can be avoided.

On the point that was raised in an intervention on the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) regarding the First Minister, whatever the trigger mechanism may or may not be, the important fact is that the First Minister may make a motion under clause 89(7)—that is, he may lay before Parliament a motion to remove a judge—only if he has received from a tribunal, constituted in pursuance of subsection 7(a), a written report concluding that the person in question

"is unfit for office by reason of inability, neglect of duty or misbehaviour"

and giving reasons for that conclusion. Therefore, unless that report is available, unless it can be laid before Parliament, the whole procedure would come to a halt. That is a reasonable situation in which to leave the matter.

I am satisfied that there is a proper balance here between protection for the judiciary—protection against errant politicking in an area where politicking is inappropriate—and, at the same time, a proper range of discretion to allow the Scottish Parliament to develop what seems to it to be the right machinery, working within the framework that has been laid down in law.

I appreciated the point that was made by the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland. He is, of course, absolutely right. Whatever the false start may have been, whatever the way in which the argument snaked and was manipulated by hon. Members on both sides of the House, as it appeared in Committee, on Report in another place and so on, the whole foundation of this process was a recognition that there was a gap in the law of Scotland, and a wish to fill that gap properly and to remove some form of indecision.

Mrs. Fyfe: We have been hearing at some length tonight about the protection of judges, but I should be grateful if, before my right hon. Friend sat down, he would answer my point about protecting the public from judges who are out of touch with the society that they serve.

Mr. Dewar: That is a helpful question, in that it raises an important point. Obviously, judges have to use their discretion in a way that is responsible and befitting their office, but it would be wrong to get into the situation where, because one disagreed with an individual judgment or some statement from the bench that one felt was objectionable or did not properly recognise the social realities of a situation, we should consider using the processes in these clauses.

If there were a feeling that a wrong approach had been taken, some guidance might be appropriate from the Lord President, for example. I am not privy to what happens among the senators of the college of justice, but, presumably, they do on occasions consult. However, it is important that we do not make the mistake of thinking that, because there has been a disagreement with one particular judgment, that necessarily gives grounds for wanting to remove a judge.

Mrs. Fyfe: I am sorry to pursue the point again. I do not think that anyone—certainly not me—is suggesting that a judge should be sacked because of one judgment with which people disagree, but, if there were a consistent pattern of reactionary social attitudes, I would certainly argue that that was a case for sacking the judge.

Dr. Fox: There—we get it right at the end.

Mr. Dewar: I do not get it. I can think of some very interesting social arguments where my hon. Friend and I might approach a problem from a slightly different angle; that is conceivable. Indeed, I have known it to happen. I do not think that that necessarily brings it into the ambit of what would trigger the use of this particular machinery. Of course, I accept that my hon. Friend is right.

If a judge, over a lengthy period, is so awry in his judicial attitudes as to become a threat to public confidence and justice, that might well be something that a panel would want to consider. However, it would want to approach it with a great deal of caution. There may be other ways to deal with the problem. It is a matter of balance, reason and a sense of responsibility. The machinery that we have put in place is likely to achieve that balance and restore public confidence, without in any way threatening the integrity and independence of the judiciary.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 126 and 127 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 128 and 129 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a), (b) and (c) in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 128 and 129 agreed to.

Schedule 5

RESERVED MATTERS

Lords amendment: No. 237, in page 64, line 16, at end insert

(", or

(c) any office in the Scottish Administration.")

8.45 pm

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 238 to 278 and 296.

Mr. McLeish: As the House is aware, schedule 5 lists the matters that are reserved to the Westminster Parliament. Those are the matters which the Government believe should be dealt with on a Great Britain or United Kingdom basis in order to preserve the integrity of the UK and to maintain a level playing field for business, workers and consumers.

Any matter that is not listed in schedule 5 is not reserved, thus giving the Scottish Parliament legislative competence for those matters that can best be dealt with by it: health, education, local government, housing, law and the criminal justice system, the environment and agriculture, and forestry and fisheries. In practical terms, the Parliament will have very wide-ranging powers to make primary legislation in key areas which affect the lives of everyone in Scotland.

During proceedings in another place, we took the opportunity to make a number of primarily technical and drafting changes to the schedule to clarify the competence of the Parliament. The amendments—which are all firmly in line with the overall approach spelt out in the White Paper in July 1997, concerning the following sections of schedule 5—fall into this category: No. 237 on the Crown; Nos. 248 and 249 on elections; No. 250 on cinema safety; Nos. 255, 257 and part of 275 on financial assistance to industry; No. 256 on oil and gas; Nos. 260 and 262 to 267 on social security and pensions; Nos. 261 and 268 on training and job search and support; and Nos. 269 to 272 on equal opportunities.

We also promoted amendments Nos. 240 to 244 and 276 to 278 to improve the layout of the schedule and its interpretation provisions. In a number of cases, we have made adjustments to the boundary between reserved and devolved matters. Further reflection revealed practical problems with the existing approach, so amendments Nos. 238, 251, 253 and 254 reserved the interception of communications in relation to the prevention and detection of serious crime, although ministerial functions will be executively devolved.

Amendments Nos. 246 and 247 update the reference to the Data Protection Act 1984 to the 1998 Act, which has the effect of slightly widening the scope of the data protection reservation. Amendment No. 258 devolves bus fuel duty rebate in line with the devolution of general bus policy.

Lords amendment No. 296 transfers minor devolved functions from the registrar of companies in Scotland and the assistant registrar of friendly societies for Scotland to the Accountant in Bankruptcy.

It is a significant list of amendments, and I shall be happy to provide further details. I commend all the amendments to House and ask the House to accept them.

Dr. Fox: I should like to ask the Minister for clarification of two very short points, the first of which is on Lords amendment No. 255. What will be the exact practical effect of passing Lords amendment No. 255? Secondly, on amendment No. 258, will he explain why—as the Government had reserved grants to operators of bus services to defray duty charged on fuel—the position has suddenly changed? What implications might that have for bus companies operating close to or across the border? I ask for clarification simply to deal with any anxiety felt by, or representations from, those groups because of the amendment.

Mr. McLeish: On the first point, financial assistance to industry, Lords amendments Nos. 255 and 257 provide clarification of the extent to which certain ministerial powers relating to the giving of financial assistance to industry will transfer to Scottish Ministers.

Lords amendment No. 255 provides that giving financial assistance under section 1 of the Mineral Exploration and Investment Grants Act 1972—so far as it relates to exploration for oil and gas—is a reserved matter; whereas Lords amendment No. 257 provides that credits and grants under sections 10 to 12 of the Industry Act 1972 are not a reserved matter. However, by virtue of clause 52, the powers under the Industry Act will be shared powers, and the UK Minister as well as Scottish Ministers will be able to exercise those powers in or as regards Scotland.

Part of Lords amendment No. 275 clarifies that the Scottish Parliament can legislate on giving financial assistance to commercial activities for the purpose of promoting or sustaining economic development or employment. That will, among other things, enable the Parliament to make general provision that permits such assistance to industries, including those operating in reserved areas. However, the Parliament will not have competence to legislate for such assistance specifically in relation to a reserved commercial activity.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, bus fuel duty, Lords amendment No. 258 removes the reservation of bus fuel duty rebate, thus making it a devolved matter in line with other aspects of bus policy. The matter was originally reserved because it was viewed as a tax matter, but it has recently been reclassified as a matter of public expenditure with responsibility for it transferred to the Scottish Office. In those circumstances, we felt that it was appropriate to remove it from the list of reserved matters.

I hope that that is an adequate explanation of the issues.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 238 to 278 agreed to.

Further consideration of Lords amendments adjourned.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

To be further considered tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1998, which were laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 12 November 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

The Minister was asked—

Common Agricultural Policy

1. **Liz Blackman** (Erewash): If he will make a statement on the time scale for reform of the common agricultural policy. [58041]

8. **Mr. Ian Pearson** (Dudley, South): What progress has been made on reform of the common agricultural policy. [58048]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): The Agenda 2000 package was published on 16 July 1997 and the proposals were adopted by the Commission on 18 March this year. Negotiations with member states on the CAP reform proposals are currently taking place with the aim of concluding negotiations by March 1999, in accordance with the timetable laid down at the Cardiff European Council.

Liz Blackman: Reform of the CAP is necessarily a slow business, but farmers need a great deal more support. In advance of CAP reform, is my right hon. Friend in a position to announce further measures now to support British farmers?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are three things that I have to do: I have to respond to the present crisis; I have to carry the farming industry through the Agenda 2000 proposals; and then I have to engage in the broader reform agenda to make sure that there is a secure future for British agriculture. The Government have already been able to announce some measures in response to the current difficulties in the industry. I have some more measures to announce that will be a charge to the public purse. I shall be seeking to make a statement in the House on Monday or Tuesday next week.

Mr. Pearson: With the euro starting on 1 January 1999, does my right hon. Friend agree that one thing that can be done to help our hard-pressed farmers and others in the food industry in the run-up to CAP reform is to give them the option of receiving their payments in euros? What plans does he have to allow that to happen?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking that question, because I am pleased to be able to announce, on behalf of the Agriculture Departments, that by autumn 2000 we shall be able to make available an option allowing payment in euros of CAP market support payments, such as export refunds and intervention payments. That will make CAP payments in euros available to a wide range of traders and to the food industry. We will be giving further thought to the possibility of extending that option to CAP direct payments to farmers. Clearly, the choice will be made by farmers; it will not be made by the Government. We hope to be able to offer the choice.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): What are the priorities of the Government's reform package? What will the Government do if they do not get their way?

Mr. Brown: Clearly, the negotiations have to be conducted with others, but my priority is to reshape the CAP so that it is less reliant on price supports and able to deal with the challenges marching towards it of an increasingly liberalised market. It is the Government's view that the current structures cannot endure in their present form.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): Does my right hon. Friend share my concerns about possible dilution of the reform proposals during the negotiation process? Will he assure the House that Britain will provide a real lead in Europe in pushing ahead with reform of the CAP so that we achieve a positive framework for farming and see an end to some of the financial pressures on consumers that have resulted from the CAP?

Mr. Brown: If the United Kingdom's reform package is adopted, there will be real savings to consumers. The UK is now able in the Council of Ministers to engage with others in driving CAP reform through. We have allies, for example, on our proposals for dairy quotas—something that the previous Government might have found it a lot harder to have.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I warmly welcome the Minister's promise to make a statement to the House on the package that he intends to introduce to ensure the long-term future of the CAP and to deal with the immediate problems of the industry. Will he tell the House the precise representations that he received from farmers' leaders at his meetings yesterday, at which the Prime Minister was present? Will the Minister be able to introduce a package of proposals that will affect the crisis that is hitting our farmers in the current year, not just next year?

Mr. Brown: The measures that I hope to be able to announce in the House on Monday or Tuesday next week are specifically targeted at the current difficulties in the industry. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that the announcement is to be made in the House; it is of such significance that, in my view, it has to be made in the House.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Minister will remember the comments made by the recently departed Secretary of State for Wales, that, in view of the crisis facing the livestock industry, there is a need for an exceptional response to exceptional circumstances.

Given that the Government made £85 million available last year and that, since then, the crisis has worsened and broadened into the sheep sector, will he give an assurance that the money made available now will be in excess of that?

Mr. Brown: The representations that the right hon. Gentleman makes on behalf of his constituents are such that I find them entirely reasonable, but I do not want to pre-empt my statement on Monday or Tuesday next week.

Meat Prices (Supermarkets)

2. **Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What recent discussions he has had with supermarket chains about meat prices. [58042]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): With my noble Friend Lord Donoughue, I was present when my right hon. Friend the Minister met representatives of the British Retail Consortium on 3 November. They explained some of the factors affecting the retail price of meat and we agreed a number of measures that should help UK producers.

Mr. Tipping: Given that some controversy has arisen between some producers and some supermarket chains over the fact that farmgate prices have fallen rapidly, while supermarket shelf prices have remained static, will my hon. Friend consider two possibilities: first, of commissioning some independent research to find out what is happening in the food and price chain; and, secondly and more important, of bringing producers and retailers together to promote British beef as the best buy—best on hygiene and best on animal welfare?

Mr. Rooker: On the second part of my hon. Friend's question, we are doing all that we can to bring producers, suppliers and supermarkets together in a constructive way. On the first part of his question, it would be best if the House awaited the forthcoming report of the Office of Fair Trading, which follows the important report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. Last week's meeting was constructive, especially in respect of the pig sector and the commitments given by the supermarkets.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): The Minister and his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food know perfectly well the level of the prices that farmers are getting for meat, and they know the prices that are being charged in supermarkets: there is an enormous margin. The supermarkets are operating a cartel against the consumer, and it is those same supermarkets that are funding, to an extremely large degree, the Labour party—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!] Naturally, I am gratified that Labour Members should feel so indignant. Can the Minister not say to his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that, the next time one of his sponsors calls in at No. 10, he might mention the outrage in the countryside that is caused by the enormous margin between what producers get and what retailers are charging?

Mr. Rooker: Some of the points that underlie the right hon. Gentleman's question have led to the supermarkets feeling very unloved and have brought about some of the concessions that they made in respect of sourcing supplies in this country, sourcing pigmeat only from suppliers that meet the same welfare standards as those that will be imposed in this country on 1 January, and correctly labelling any imported meat that they bring in, so that it is fairly labelled and they do not try to sell it off—I nearly said "flog it off"—as British when it is not.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does my hon. Friend realise that having a go at New Zealand producers, who represent only a small part of our import market, while not doing anything about the supermarkets that are really ripping off the consumer, is counter-productive? What we need is a sensible agreement that does not bankrupt British farmers or those who supply us with good-quality produce; and, at the same time, we must ensure that some members of the Conservative party, some of whom are in the House, do not walk away with bags of gold at the expense of the housewife.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend is right. Nothing that the Government have done or supported is an attack on our suppliers and friends in New Zealand, who have supplied this country with quality produce for decades. It is up to individual producers and supermarkets in this country to arrange their supply chain. We ask them to consider the British supply chain. We ask them not to impose conditions on British food producers and then buy from foreign producers who do not meet the same welfare conditions.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Does the Minister agree that, as farm incomes have decreased by more than £2 billion in the past two years, the very survival of British farmers depends on a lot more than supermarket prices—it depends on direct action by the Government? As we have been promised a statement in the House next week, will the Minister confirm that, as a minimum, he will use the statement to apply the whole of the large underspend on the agriculture budget from the past two years to extend the calf processing scheme for a year, to raise hill livestock compensatory allowances by 50 per cent. and to enable the agrimonetary compensation currently available for the livestock sector to be taken up?

Mr. Rooker: I ask the hon. Gentleman and the rest of the House to await the statement that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has offered to make next Monday or Tuesday. It is preposterous to expect detailed answers from the Dispatch Box today when we have promised a statement next week.

Pig Industry

3. **Mr. William Thompson** (West Tyrone): If he will make a statement on the current state of the pig industry. [58043]

10. **Mr. John Townend** (East Yorkshire): If he will make a statement on the current state of the pig industry. [58051]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): I take the current crisis in the pig industry very seriously. The industry is going through a difficult time as a result of low market prices. That is mainly the result of over-production, which has led to a distorted version of the classic pig cycle.

Mr. Thompson: I welcome the Minister's reply that the Government now appreciate the serious problems in the pig industry and the fact that there will be a statement next week, but will he confirm that the package will contain a significant element to ease pig farmers' problems?

Mr. Brown: The Government have been taking a range of actions to try to help the pig industry, and I am conscious of the particular difficulties in the Province, where the processing fire made matters substantially worse. We introduced special aid there to help in those local circumstances. I cannot introduce new state aid for the pig industry. It is a relatively liberal market; the Commission determined that it should stay that way, and its broad approach is right.

Mr. Townend: Does the Minister agree that one of the major problems facing pig farmers is that they are not able to compete on a level playing field with their competitors in Europe, principally because of the actions of British Governments? For example, they have to spend millions of pounds on getting rid of stalls and tethers, which the Dutch and the Danes do not have to pay for; they are not allowed to feed bonemeal to their pigs, but the Dutch and the Danes can; and the income that they used to get from rendering has been turned into a loss because of the increase in health regulations. What will the Minister do to make that playing field more level?

In view of what his colleague the Minister of State said about the need for the supermarkets to buy pigmeat that is welfare friendly, will the right hon. Gentleman instruct public sector institutions such as hospitals, schools and defence establishments to change their tender specifications so that the only pork and bacon that are acceptable come from pigs that have not been fed bonemeal or kept in stalls and tethers, so levelling the playing field a little?

Mr. Brown: I fully accept that pig producers are entitled to a welfare premium on their produce. Parliament put in place the stall and tether ban for perfectly proper reasons. That is an on-cost in the industry, and in the European Union market, which is a free market; it is not met by other producers. In those circumstances, it is reasonable for parliamentarians to say that consumers should be able to buy to the highest welfare standards and the highest produce standards. As the hon. Gentleman rightly points out, meat and bonemeal are not fed to pigs in this country. As a consumer of pigmeat, that is something that I like to know—so when I buy pigmeat in the supermarket, I look for the Union Jack. That is a perfectly sensible thing to do.

On public procurement, I cannot rewrite the procurement policies of other Departments, but I have had discussions with the Secretary of State for Defence, who assures me that purchases for the armed services are 100 per cent. British for fresh pigmeat and over 50 per cent. British for bacon. The services are trying to improve on that. I have made representations to other substantial public sector purchasers. I certainly intend to do everything that I reasonably can, within the rules, to help the industry through what I freely acknowledge are very difficult times.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will my right hon. Friend enlighten me? I understand that, as a result of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis, the technology of traceability has improved by leaps and bounds. If we are to emancipate the consumer, can we use that new traceability technology—the ability to identify whether products are British or foreign, and even trace back to the field and farm where the pig was produced—to provide real consumer choice, including organic choice, in pig production?

Mr. Brown: The conditions of production are such in this country that, if a discerning consumer wishes to purchase to the highest welfare and feed standards, he or she could do no better than to buy British pig meat. As my hon. Friend points out correctly, traceability is here to stay. It will be a continuing feature of all meat markets in the United Kingdom in one form or another.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Last Wednesday, the Minister claimed, at column 952 of *Hansard*, that he had agreed with the British Retail Consortium that all pigmeat sold in supermarkets would be from animals raised to the high welfare standards required in Britain. Is the Minister aware that, the previous day, the consortium had said that the agreement applied only to fresh pigmeat? Was the House misled last week? Does the Minister understand that there is a huge difference between those two statements? Do not pig farmers deserve a fair deal from the Government, not a fudged one?

Mr. Brown: Pig farmers will get the fairest deal that I can give them. The original press release issued by both my Department and the British Retail Consortium was agreed by the parties beforehand. A second version of the press release was issued by the British Retail Consortium, inserting the word "fresh". Therefore, it could be claimed that that distorted its meaning.

The British Retail Consortium assures me that its commitment regarding pigmeat sold in its outlets—being stall and tether-free and meat and bonemeal-free—applies not only to fresh pork but to processed products, such as bacon, and is being extended to cover ham, sausages and even pork pies. Some retailers are already sourcing welfare-friendly pigmeat. They are major advances, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming them.

Moorlands Regeneration

4. **Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): What proposals he has to encourage the regeneration of the moorlands. [58044]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): We intend to improve both the environmentally sensitive areas scheme and the countryside stewardship scheme to give greater encouragement to regenerating moorland.

We will also add £1 million to the budget for new countryside stewardship agreements for next year in order to increase the number of agreements in the uplands.

Charlotte Atkins: I thank the Minister for that answer, because the evidence of farmers in trouble in Staffordshire, Moorlands is all too apparent: broken stone walls, derelict farm buildings, wildlife under threat and overgrown fields. I am particularly concerned about the countryside stewardship scheme in the uplands because it has been a lifeline to many farmers in my area.

Mr. Morley: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that the countryside stewardship scheme is very important in terms not only of environmental enhancement but of support for the rural economy, providing jobs and the opportunity to revive skills that have been lost, such as dry stone walling and hedge laying. For that reason, we have added a further £1 million to the scheme. In 1998, we expect to offer a total of 1,344 country stewardship agreements.

Farm Diversification

5. **Mr. Derek Foster** (Bishop Auckland): What measures have been taken to promote farm diversification. [58045]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): Funding to encourage a wide range of agricultural activities, including farm diversification, is available in the six areas designated to receive assistance under the English objective 5b structural fund programmes. No grant aid for farm diversification is available outside those areas.

Mr. Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I am very pleased to see him in his place, and offer him my full support. On diversification, will he bear in mind the fact that the 600 sheep farmers in upper Teesdale, in my constituency—which he will soon visit—have been undergoing the worst crisis in the 20 years that I have been a Member of Parliament, and perhaps in 25 years? Will he also bear in mind the fact that they are mostly tenant farmers, and that there is very little incentive for them to diversify, because any betterment goes to the landlord?

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point, and I thank him for his kind remarks. I do intend to visit his constituents soon, but only after I have made my announcement on Monday or Tuesday next week, when I hope that I shall have said something that will please them.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I am glad that the Minister is as brave as ever. Does he agree that the draft rural development regulations that are being laid before the Commission at present are excessively timid, whether in relation to farm diversification, agri-environmental measures or other rural development measures? Does he agree that effective reform of the common agricultural policy will depend on a much braver, bolder initiative by the Commission than the one that we have seen?

Mr. Brown: The Commission's proposals are a useful start to CAP reform because they go in the right direction. I am strongly committed to diversification measures. Farm diversification already accounts for about 11 per cent. of all farm incomes, so it has an important part to play in the rural economy—perhaps more than is sometimes appreciated. I strongly support the extension of such measures, and will do what I can to achieve that.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, to diversify fully, farmers will need to be helped by liberalisation of the planning regime in our country? Will he join me in welcoming the Government's announcement that they intend to liberalise that regime? I know, as a result of meeting people in the rural part of my constituency, that they do want enterprise in the countryside and they do want to work in the countryside. They do not want to freeze the countryside in aspic, as the green belt policies of the Conservative party often seem to want to do.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is important that the Government take a constructive attitude to farm diversification policies. About 41 per cent. of farms benefit from some form of diversification. That is a good thing, and should be supported.

Food Safety

6. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What assessment he has made of food safety standards across the European Union. [58046]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): The Government are anxious to promote common high food safety standards throughout the European Union. Monitoring in this area is the responsibility of the Commission, and we continue to press almost daily for the maintenance of high and consistent standards.

Dr. Lewis: What does it tell us about food safety standards in the European Union that, of the 1,700 cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy to have been expected on the continent as a result of our exports of beef to the continent between 1985 and 1990, only 30 cases were reported? Does it mean that the pure air of the continent miraculously cures cattle of BSE when they breathe it, or does it mean that some of our partners in the European Union are less honest than we are in reporting BSE outbreaks?

Mr. Rooker: I do not think that it tells us what the hon. Gentleman implies. In this country, in respect of EU directives in meat hygiene, we have under-regulated and under-enforced the regulations, which was a matter of deliberate policy by the previous Government. *[Interruption.]* The Conservatives may not like it, but it is a fact, so it is nonsense to suggest that we are the only ones obeying the rules. In some respects, regulations in the meat hygiene sector in other parts of the European Union are better enforced than in this country. We are seeking to raise standards of meat hygiene in this country, and to enforce regulations and directives rigorously.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I thank my hon. Friend for saying that the Government must urgently take steps to improve regulation and its

enforcement. Will he acknowledge that there is sustained and, if anything, growing public concern about the need for independent and consistent advice throughout the area of food safety? What steps does he propose to take, not simply to follow what is going on in the rest of the European Union, but to set an example?

Mr. Rooker: The greatest example that Europe will have is the Food Standards Agency, when we set it up. That was one of the most popular proposals in the manifesto. The idea that we shall share with Europe in due course will concern separation of responsibility for food safety standards from the Ministry responsible for sponsoring the food industry and food producers. That is why we have already taken steps to lock all key food standards policy decisions into the joint food standards and safety group with the Department of Health, so that no key decisions on food safety will be taken by MAFF alone. That is a lesson and a practice which we can sell to the rest of Europe.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Returning to the Minister's opening response to the question, and given the near daily contact that he and his colleagues have with the European Commission to encourage and maintain food safety standards across the European Union, and the impact of imports to this country, does he agree that our hand would be immeasurably strengthened in making those proper representations if there were no remaining ambiguity about the progress and process of food standards legislation in this country? Will he clear up the ambiguity that remains, particularly as we want to maintain our leverage on Europe, as well as improve our standards at home?

Mr. Rooker: I do not believe that there is ambiguity. The measures that have been taken in the past 18 months in setting up the joint food standards and safety group—a discrete group operating across two Government Departments in a way that is almost unique in government—are a major step. We are considering further ways to raise the profile of the group and its work. We published the White Paper. We distributed 3 million leaflets through a supermarket chain earlier in the year, telling people why we need an independent Food Standards Agency. Those reasons are as relevant today as when we made the proposal. The fact that, over the past 18 months, we have been able to deal with food crises without closing down sectors of the food industry is a measure of our success in co-operating. The principal instrument is the fact that no key food safety standards decisions are made exclusively in MAFF any longer—they are made in total co-operation and agreement with the Department of Health.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I welcome my hon. Friend's comments about the progress of the Food Standards Agency. Will he take this opportunity to deny press speculation that the Government have abandoned that project because of pressure from food manufacturers?

Mr. Rooker: I have no better way to give the lie to that than to recall the words of the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box about two weeks ago. The establishment of the Food Standards Agency remains Government policy. There has been no pressure. No one in the food industry has said to MAFF during our consultations on the White Paper, when we received more than 1,100 responses, and at conferences throughout the country since then, that he does not want the Food Standards Agency. The entire food industry, to a greater or lesser degree, sees merit in introducing an independent element into the way in which we make decisions. There has been no back-door pressure whatever.

What is more, there is no turf war between Ministries in Whitehall. MAFF will give up the regulation of food standards and safety. That is part of Government policy and of the manifesto on which we were elected. It cannot be done overnight, and it must be done while maintaining existing standards and strengthening the processes, until the legislation is passed.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Many people will be surprised at the Minister's last remark. Perhaps he will explain to the House why the draft Bill promised months ago has not yet appeared.

Food can come into this country from any European country without any checks being made. Why are the standards for poultrymeat that comes in from third countries less rigorous than those for home-produced chicken? Why does the Minister intend to put even more vets into our slaughterhouses and to charge the slaughterhouse owners, while allowing imports from Thailand and Brazil, which do have such rigorous standards applied to them? I understand that he does not even know what tests are made on such imports, or what the results of those tests are.

Mr. Rooker: The short answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is that we are in the single market, which we were taken into by the Conservative Government, and within which there is free trade. Within the EU, products can be freely transferred between countries. On occasion, especially in the meat sector, spot checks are made at the border points of entry and consignments turned back.

In relation to food coming into Britain, we take into account the evidence obtained through checks around the world. We wish to make standards higher than they have been hitherto and we shall continue to do that.

Genetically Modified Foods

7. **Ms Debra Shipley** (Stourbridge): What steps the Government are taking to ensure the clear labelling of genetically modified foods. [58047]

12. **Mrs. Eileen Gordon** (Romford): What steps the Government are taking to ensure the clear labelling of genetically modified foods. [58053]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): The Government have widely publicised the EC regulations which require all foods containing GM materials to be clearly labelled and have made it clear that they expect those to be effectively enforced.

Ms Shipley: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply and for his extensive written replies to my constituents, many of whom, along with many organisations in Stourbridge, have written to me on the subject.

Is there not a problem, in that the EU thresholds for GM ingredients have not yet been agreed, and the labelling regulations that came into force on 1 September do not include ingredients which are part of the manufacturing and refining processes?

Mr. Rooker: I agree with my hon. Friend. The rules that came into force on 1 September apply to the ingredients in the food purchased by the consumer; they do not affect the manufacturing process where GM materials may have been used but are no longer part of the ingredients.

We are negotiating on the important issue of tolerance levels. The new rules do not apply to additives and flavourings. We think that they should and we are pursuing that in Brussels. It is important to have tolerance levels for GM produce. At a public meeting recently, I learned that some manufacturers have commercial contracts for buying and selling foods to each other where tolerance levels of 0.1 to 1 per cent. are allowed for GM produce in allegedly non-GM foods.

Mrs. Gordon: Will my hon. Friend emphasise the Government's view and intention that consumers should be told exactly what is in their food so that they can make an informed choice about whether to purchase it? Does he intend to take further measures to increase consumer confidence and is he planning any sanctions or actions against food producers and retailers that do not comply with clear-labelling regulations?

Mr. Rooker: Abuse or breach of the labelling regulations will result in prosecution by the regulatory authorities. That is important. Only four foods have been approved for sale in Britain—maize, soya, vegetarian cheese and GM tomato paste. All are required to be effectively labelled so that consumers have a choice. MAFF has produced a list of 59 non-GM soya producers in the United States and Canada, so that people in Britain can source that material and declare that it is not genetically modified. We have taken steps in that respect.

A sub-group of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes will shortly be holding a further open meeting to discuss the post-marketing and monitoring of those foods. It is not sufficient for them to be regulated and approved as rigorously as they are, and then for the Government and the regulatory authorities to walk away. We shall monitor the foods and their use throughout the food chain, both for human and animal health, and we shall set up procedures for that.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Are the Government planning to give farmers some protection against any legal liability which might arise as a result of damage to the health of consumers who eat GM crops and food? Has the Minister been told that planeloads of GM food are coming in by the day from the United States, where GM and non-GM foods are grown, processed and sold together? That makes a bit of a nonsense of the labelling that we are talking about with regard to Europe.

Mr. Rooker: I must make it clear that when those foods end up on the supermarket shelves, their labels must state that they contain genetically modified ingredients. That is a requirement. If GM and non-GM ingredients are mixed in the manufacturing process, the made-up food, especially soya, must be labelled as genetically modified before it can be sold in the supermarket. We cannot legally force the Americans to segregate, but one day they will wake up to the fact that market pressure—which they well understand—will probably force segregation. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that that material is now in this country, but labelling is required. Consumers then have the choice of whether to buy it.

Under the Food Safety Act 1990, liability rests on the seller and the producer of the food. No one needs immunities in that respect. There is a requirement on producers and sellers to ensure that the food that they sell is safe.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister will be aware that no test can say whether milk has been produced with the addition of synthetic or recombinant bovine somatotropin in the production process. As there can therefore be no viable labelling regime, will he reassure the House and consumers that the Government will campaign in Brussels for an extension of the moratorium on the use of BST?

Mr. Rooker: Yes.

Fishing Industry

9. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): When he last met representatives of the fishing industry to discuss the current state of the fishing industry. [58049]

15. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): When he last held discussions with representatives of the fishing industry to discuss protection of the Irish box. [58056]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I regularly meet fishing industry representatives and I last met the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations on 20 October. Discussions have covered a wide range of issues, including fishing quotas, but not the protection of the Irish box.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. In his discussions, which have covered a wide range of issues, has it been brought to his attention that in Grimsby and Cleethorpes there is no permanent memorial to those who lost their lives at sea? Will he support a local campaign, launched by the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*, to raise money for such a memorial?

Mr. Morley: The *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* and its sister newspaper, the *Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*, have an excellent record in community campaigning and involvement. I was privileged recently to unveil a memorial to lost British trawler men in Iceland. It was partly funded by North-East Lincolnshire council—formerly Grimsby council—Aberdeen council and Hull city council. It is important to recognise the sacrifices and dangers faced by our deep-sea fleet, both in the past and in the present. I wish the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* well in its campaign, which is a fitting tribute for the new millennium to the history of Grimsby.

Mr. Connarty: My hon. Friend the Minister will remember the anger that we all felt when, having told us

that the Irish box would be protected in the negotiations, the previous Government returned from Brussels having sold out fishing in the Irish box for some other deal. My hon. Friend says that there have been no further discussions on protection of the Irish box. Will the Government make it a priority to win back protection of the Irish box, which is vital to Scottish and other northern fishermen who fish in the west?

Mr. Morley: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. A great deal of the Irish box comes within the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland, but we have jurisdiction over England and Scotland through the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency. May I inform my hon. Friend that we have recently agreed new contracts for aerial supervision of areas such as the Irish box? State-of-the-art technology will ensure that all fishing boats, from whatever country, follow the rules.

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): Although I appreciate that attention must be given to controlling the effort of the most efficient forms of fishing, does the Minister agree that much more attention must now be paid to giving sustainable methods of fishery appropriate promotion and encouragement, such as we see around the shores of this country in the inshore industry?

Mr. Morley: I recognise that point. The inshore industry has many advantages—it is low impact and it can be highly sustainable. It has, of course, to come within the quota management and the enforcement rules. Post-2002, in a review of the common fisheries policy, there may be an opportunity to examine the role of sustainable fisheries. Indeed, we are also giving thought to quota management for our inshore fleet to find out whether we can assist the industry better, but the key to enforcement and sustainability is to ensure that the rules are obeyed. The Government have made it clear that they intend to do that.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Has the hon. Gentleman made it clear in those meetings that, if article 14(2) of regulation 3760/92 is read in its entirety, there is not the slightest doubt in law that a unanimous vote in the European Union for still further derogations will be necessary because, otherwise, other nations will be able to demand complete access to the United Kingdom's exclusive fishing zone after 2002? Perhaps the Minister will share with the House what concessions he is already planning to make against this nation's national interest, to try to secure that unanimity.

Mr. Morley: We do not need any lessons from the Conservative party about concessions in the fishing industry. The hon. Gentleman is misreading the implications of that regulation. I am quite confident that, post-2002, relative stability, which is important to the United Kingdom industry, will continue unless there is a majority vote against that. In the same way, coastal limits will, in my view, be renewed post-2002. The key to access is quota access. If relative stability is maintained—I am absolutely confident that it will be—the issue does not arise.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The Attorney-General was asked—

Foreign Nationals (Prosecution)

27. **Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): If he will make a statement on his policy on the prosecution of foreign nationals while in the United Kingdom for the torture and killings of British citizens elsewhere. [58031]

The Attorney-General (Mr. John Morris): Cases involving possible criminal proceedings on the basis of extra-territorial jurisdiction are considered in the same way as any other case—that is, in accordance with the twin tests set out in the code for Crown prosecutors; whether there is sufficient admissible evidence to provide a realistic prospect of a conviction, and whether the prosecution is in the public interest. That applies equally to those cases that require my consent to be prosecuted, such as allegations of offences under section 134 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Mr. Winnick: Arising from what my right hon. and learned Friend has said, is it not important that former murderous dictators—for example, Idi Amin, or Saddam Hussein, when he is, I hope, no longer in power—should not consider the United Kingdom to be some kind of safe haven from justice, international law and extradition agreements with other countries? Should not that be made perfectly clear today?

The Attorney-General: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, but I remind him that the investigation of criminal misconduct is for the police to undertake. If a file of evidence is submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service for consideration of a prosecution, or if I receive an application for consent to prosecute, each case will be considered in the usual way—that is, by applying the twin tests that I have mentioned.

If the issue arose in respect of Mr. Milosevic, there is the international tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and we would therefore expect Milosevic to appear in The Hague for trial. The United Kingdom provided additional funds for an additional court room in The Hague, which I had the privilege of opening in the summer.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): What advice would the Attorney-General give to Ministers if a court held that an individual should be extradited, but letters of comfort or undertakings had been given by the Government or the previous Government, and had not been revoked, which made it clear that that individual could come to this country—for example, for medical treatment—without fear of extradition?

The Attorney-General: If I were asked for advice, that advice would take into consideration all relevant factors in any individual case. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the fact and the contents of a Law Officer's advice to Ministers is confidential.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): If a person comes to this country with diplomatic immunity, is it not incumbent on this country—the host country—to tell that

person that he is not welcome, rather than allowing him to come with diplomatic immunity, and allowing certain other events to take their course? If the principle of diplomatic immunity is broken, is that not a bad thing, and could it not rebound on our country's diplomats in future?

The Attorney-General: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. The hon. Gentleman will have read in the newspapers, as I have, that an issue with some implications of that sort is now before the House of Lords. As I understand the ruling, it is currently sub judice.

Crown Prosecution Service

28. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): When he last met the President of the Law Society to discuss the work of the Crown Prosecution Service. [58032]

The Attorney-General: I met the then president of the Law Society on 1 June 1998 to discuss the Glidewell report. My hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General and I met his successor for a general discussion on 13 October.

Mr. Jack: I thank the Attorney-General for his answer, but I am sorry that the question of rights of audience for lawyers employed by the Crown Prosecution Service was not on the agenda for those discussions. The Attorney-General will know that members of the Bar and, indeed, the judiciary have reservations about lawyers being given rights of audience. Conversely, those represented by the Law Society feel that they should have them. The matter has been around for a considerable time. Can the Attorney-General tell us what is the current position, when action will be taken and when the issue will be resolved?

The Attorney-General: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman was a Member of Parliament in 1990, when the Courts and Legal Services Act was passed—an Act which he supported. Unfortunately, the legislation created a problem that took years and years—six years, in the case of employed solicitors—to resolve. We are determined to change that.

Employed solicitors now have limited access to the higher courts. The position of the employed Bar is being dealt with by the same machinery, and I hope that will be a much shorter process. As regards the future, the Lord Chancellor has drawn up proposals to open all the courts to all lawyers. Consultation was completed on 14 September and, when the Lord Chancellor has made a decision—soon, I hope—and when time is available, legislation will be introduced. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we shall not fall into the trap of the 1990 Act.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will my right hon. and learned Friend contact the Crown Prosecution Service about the extraordinary events involving Britain's most senior woman judge? She was involved in an accident—which she has admitted to have been entirely her fault—in which a nanny employed by her family received appalling facial injuries. Glass is still embedded behind her eyes and it is possible that she will lose her sight in both eyes. The judge has been told that she will not be prosecuted, but must undergo a number of hours of extra tuition in driving skills. She will face no charge—she will incur no penalty points and no fine. The young nanny, however, was warned that she might be charged with the offence of not wearing a seat belt. Is that not extraordinary? The impression might well be gained that there is soft justice for judges and the gentry, but tough law for nannies and all the rest of us.

The Attorney-General: I am, of course, aware of the newspaper reports of the incident, as far as they go. However, it is an operational matter for the police. The decision was made by the police; they did not consult the CPS, and they were not required to do so. The matter is not within my ministerial responsibility.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): First, may I take this opportunity of welcoming Mr. David Calvert-Smith QC as the new Director of Public Prosecutions and wish him well in his demanding role?

In relation to that role, does the Attorney-General recall that more than 18 months ago, within days of coming to office, he announced the appointment by April this year of 42 new chief Crown prosecutors for each police area—some of whom, no doubt, would be solicitors and members of the Law Society?

Is it not the case that, more than 18 months later and almost six months after the Glidewell report, no new chief Crown prosecutors have been appointed? When can we expect those appointments? Is that not another example of the Government pretending to come in with a bang, but, after one and a half years, finding it difficult even to utter a whimper?

The Attorney-General: I assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that we did come in with a bang and started to deal with the appalling mess that he and the Conservative Government had left us. They remained silent when everyone in the land knew that something was appallingly wrong with the Crown Prosecution Service. We immediately decided that the service should have 42 areas and we appointed a chief executive shortly after the Glidewell report was published. The review considered in great depth the evidence it was given and its report was welcomed by all. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will also now welcome it. We have also appointed a new Director of Public Prosecution, Mr. David Calvert-Smith, who is a distinguished member of the Bar with great prosecuting experience. His appointment, too, was welcomed by all. Now that he is in post, he can advertise for and interview applicants for the 42 posts of chief Crown prosecutor.

Child Prostitution

30. **Mr. Colin Breed** (South-East Cornwall): If he will make it his policy not to prosecute children under 16 years for prostitution–related offences. [58035]

The Solicitor-General (Mr. Ross Cranston): Prostitution itself is not a criminal offence. However, a person who loiters or solicits for the purpose of prostitution does commit a criminal offence. There is strong evidence that most young people engaged in prostitution are victims of abuse and exploitation.

The primary response, therefore, is to identify a form a diversionary action, which will protect young people from further harm and enable them to resume an age-appropriate life style. However, criminal sanctions against a young person who persistently and voluntarily returns to prostitution need to be retained.

Mr. Breed: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for that reply. I hope that he has had an opportunity to read the excellent report on prostitution by the Soroptimist international working party, which states that between 1989 and 1993, some 3,300 young girls were prosecuted, yet in 1993, only 49 adults were convicted for pimping. Are not we placing far more emphasis on pursuing the victims of the crime than on punishing the real criminals?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. The children are victims and the focus of attention should be on those who abuse and coerce them. I congratulate the police, who, in the past year, have done ground-breaking work on the matter. The Association of Chief Police Officers guidelines, which emphasise diversion, have been piloted in Wolverhampton and Northampton. The Government will prepare, for the first time, comprehensive guidelines for agencies dealing with children to divert girls and boys from a life in prostitution.

Ms Jenny Jones (Wolverhampton, South-West): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend on his appointment as Solicitor-General and welcome him to his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. He mentioned the pilot scheme in Wolverhampton, which is developing new ways to deal with under-age prostitution, based on the premise that children under 16 who are forced into prostitution should be treated as victims of child abuse and not as criminals. How many prosecutions of adults who force children under 16 into prostitution have there been as a result of the scheme in Wolverhampton? As his constituency is only a few miles down the road from mine, will he come to Wolverhampton to see the good work that is being done?

The Solicitor-General: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind remarks. As she said, we have adjoining constituencies and I will take her up on her invitation.

The pilot in Wolverhampton last year and early this year has had a beneficial effect in that only 10 out of 66 children identified have returned to prostitution. More importantly, as my hon. Friend rightly said, the pilot has led to the prosecution of adults—18 have been charged with very serious offences, including rape, kidnap, unlawful imprisonment and attempting to pervert the course of justice. Five have already been convicted and the other cases are on-going.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Bearing in mind the fact that the Solicitor-General said that under-16-year-olds are more often victims and are extremely vulnerable in prostitution cases, what advice would he give the Government about under-16 activities in the event that the age of homosexual consent is reduced to 16?

The Solicitor-General: As the hon. Lady knows, that is a matter for a free vote. The current law covers only soliciting by girls, so we need to address the problem of prostitution by boys. She will also be aware that the Government have sexual offences under review. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will introduce proposals for reforming the law in the coming year.

Business of the House

Madam Speaker: At this time I would take the private notice question to the Secretary of State for Health, but there is a problem with the Department's computers. As the Leader and shadow Leader of the House have been able to make themselves available, it will be sensible for us to proceed with the business question, and take the private notice question when the Minister is here.

3.31 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): We completely accept your judgment, Madam Speaker, although we hope that this is not a foretaste of the millennium bug. Will the Leader of the House be kind enough to give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 16 NOVEMBER—Until about 7 o'clock, conclusion of consideration of Lords amendments to the Scotland Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Regional Development Agencies Bill.

Consideration of any Lords Amendments which may be received.

TUESDAY 17 NOVEMBER—Motion to approve the seventh report from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on the scrutiny of European business and proposed amendments to standing orders.

Motion to appoint a new Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Motion on the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Specified Organisations) (No. 2) Order.

Consideration of any Lords Amendments which may be received.

WEDNESDAY 18 NOVEMBER—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Consideration of any Lords amendments which may be received to the Northern Ireland Bill.

Consideration of any Lords messages which may be received.

THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER AND FRIDAY 20 NOVEMBER—The House will be prorogued when Royal Assent to all Acts has been signified.

The House will also wish to be reminded that, on Wednesday 18 November, there will be a debate on agrimonetary arrangements and the introduction of the euro in European Standing Committee A, and a debate on European Commission development aid to South Africa (1986-96) in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Wednesday 18 November: European Standing Committee A: European Community document: 9597/98, agrimonetary arrangements following the introduction of the Euro. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: (a) HC 155-xxxiii and HC 155-xxxviii (1997–98) European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 9690/98, EC development aid to South Africa (1986–1996). Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 155-xxxvi (1997–98).]

Sir Patrick Cormack: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business for next week. Will she conduct an investigation into the computer effectiveness of various Government Departments, so that we do not have a repetition of what I am sure she will agree has been an unfortunate occurrence this afternoon?

Will the Leader of the House make a statement to the House on Monday on the concordat between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, and tell us what bearing it will have on the allocation of Opposition days in the next Session?

Will the Leader of the House tell us the Government's intentions if the other place once again rejects the closed-list system for European elections? Is she aware that, in the recent debates here and in the other place, not a single Labour Member of Parliament or Labour peer spoke in favour of the closed-list system? Has she sought the advice of the hon. Members for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on the desirability of that system? Can she name a single Labour Back Bencher who enthusiastically supports it?

The Leader of the House will know that my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House and I have asked for debates on the economy and on foreign affairs. We appreciate that, as this lengthy Session grinds to a close, she will not be able to give a day's debate to both those subjects next week, but will she assure us, given the critical situation of Iraq, that a statement will be made next week and time found for a debate, if necessary? Will she also give an assurance that we will have proper, full debates on the earliest possible dates in the new Session, not only on the Queen's Speech, but on the economy and on foreign affairs?

Will the Leader of the House give us next week, perhaps in lieu of the normal Business Statement, a statement on how she views the timetable for the coming Session? Will she try to ensure that the Government's legislative zeal does not leave the House unable to debate adequately and properly, non-legislative subjects? Will she especially assure us that, if House of Lords reform is in the Queen's Speech, every stage of that Bill will be taken on the Floor of the House?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman asked about the viability of computers used in Government Departments. We all regret the difficulties that have been caused today, and nobody more so that Ministers from the Department of Health. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government endeavour to ensure that Departments provide the right service to the House as to others.

The hon. Gentleman asked about discussions that are taking place. I am sure that he is aware that there have been discussions between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats in the past, which focused primarily on constitutional issues and matters on which the two parties were in agreement. That is all that is under debate today.

The hon. Gentleman asked about—oh dear, all I have written down is, "intentions with regard to the other place". It might be helpful if the hon. Gentleman were to

provide me with a summary list, if he and his right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House intend to ask as many as seven or nine questions at Business Questions, because it is hard to keep track of them. The hon. Gentleman asked about our intentions, and it remains the Government's view that they have put forward the right legislation. It has been carried in the House, and the Government will continue to advocate its cause in the other place.

The hon. Gentleman asked for debates on the economy and foreign affairs, with especial attention to the issue of Iraq. He is aware that we anticipate Queen's Speech debates in the not-too-distant future, and I cannot pre-empt the timetable beyond then. However, I can assure him that we will try to the best of our ability to keep the House informed, as we have so far, about the handling of the issue of Iraq.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the parliamentary timetable for the next Session. It is always a question of balance. When the Government have a full programme, especially if they have recently come to office, a tension is always felt between that programme and more general debates. We will put forward a programme of legislation that will be a further substantial step towards implementing the Government's manifesto, and we will do our utmost to reconcile that with proper debate.

The hon. Gentleman's final question concerned reform of the other place. It is of course not proper for me to pre-empt or prejudge what might be in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Prime Minister made it clear on the "Today" programme this morning that British forces could be engaged in military action by the end of next week? That statement was not made in the House, and no provision has been made for a debate on the matter, whatever its merits may be. That is not the proper way in which to treat the House of Commons.

Is my right hon. Friend further aware that the current relations between two political parties in the House are not a private matter between two party leaders, but concern the relationship between the legislature and the Executive? Will there still be Supply days for the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) now that he is on a Cabinet Committee? Will it be possible for us to table parliamentary questions to him? Has not Parliament been totally sidelined over two fundamental matters that affect the rights of Members to represent both service men and the people who elected a Labour Government, not a Lib-Lab Government?

Mrs. Beckett: I did hear the interview to which my right hon. Friend referred. I am also well aware that he, like many other Members, is a jealous guardian of the rights of the House. However, I did not take from the interview given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the reading that my right hon. Friend the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has given in suggesting that the Prime Minister said something that has not been said in the House. I do not recall whether my right hon. Friend was in his place—he probably was—during Prime Minister's Questions yesterday, when the Prime Minister made remarks almost identical to those that he made on the radio this morning.

There is no question of the Prime Minister having said something that he has not aired here. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has repeatedly kept the House informed, as has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. The House is aware of the unchanged situation in Iraq during the past few days; Saddam Hussein has chosen to break the agreements made both after the Gulf war, and with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The House has been kept informed. I cannot agree with my right hon. Friend that the Prime Minister has said something different today from what he has said in the House.

My right hon. Friend also asked about the discussions between the Liberal Democrat party and the Labour party. I repeat that those discussions have hitherto focused on constitutional matters. A discussion is taking place today on whether there are other matters on which there is sufficient agreement on policy issues to merit further exploration. Those discussions are in progress, but they have come to no conclusion. There is no question of appointments or of procedures of the type mentioned by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Pursuant to the first question put by my hon. Friend the deputy shadow Leader of the House, may I ask for a statement next week on the Government's progress towards anticipating the millennium bug, particularly following the Task Force 2000 report, which states that nine Departments are not up to speed—led, embarrassingly, by the Department of Trade and Industry?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot undertake to allow for a statement next week, but there will certainly be a statement soon to give an update. The Government began to give the House such updates on preparations, for the millennium bug—particularly our own—and we shall certainly continue to do so.

I am aware of the Task Force 2000 report. As task force members would acknowledge, the situation is continually changing. I do not share all the analysis by the task force, but I am always happy to know that others are concerned about the matter. It is vital that everyone who is aware of the issue should continue to urge people in all organisations, particularly those who run small and medium businesses, to take as much action as possible. There is still time in which to make a substantial difference to people's preparedness, and in which to prepare contingency plans for unforeseen developments. We are doing both those things, and we shall continue to report progress to the House.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May I return to the concordat between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats? There has been no discussion of that matter in the parliamentary Labour party or in the wider Labour party. It is a great relief to hear that there will be no appointments of Liberal Democrats to Cabinet Sub-Committees. If there are to be constitutional changes, so that Liberal Democrats can be secreted on to Cabinet Sub-Committees, will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House ensure that a statement is made to the House—not, with respect, by her, but by the Prime Minister?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend says that this matter has not been discussed in this context recently within the

[Mrs. Beckett]

parliamentary party, but, as I pointed out some moments ago, all that has been said in the announcement under discussion is that, as arrangements already exist in the form of a channel for communication and discussion on issues where there is agreement and common ground, in particular on constitutional issues, it is being considered whether there are other areas of agreement and common ground.

My hon. Friend will be entirely aware, as is the whole House, that, although we may see eye to eye with members of other parties, including even those in the Tory party, on issues such as economic and monetary union, there are those in the official Opposition who see rather more eye to eye with this Government than they do with their own on this matter. It is sensible, mature politics to take forward ideas with those where there is common ground. Obviously, there are many issues, as I am sure the Liberal Democrats would be the first to acknowledge, on which there is not common ground, about which we not only disagree, but express our disagreement.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Tyler: First, I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the Leader of the House for the fact that I was caught out by the change in the sequence of the business and the late announcement on the Annunciator.

I am sure that the Leader of the House will agree that, when the far left and the far right attack one, one knows that one has it just about right. After 35 years in politics, I have learnt that through experience. Can the Leader of the House give us any indication when it may be possible to allocate time for a debate on Iraq? There is a general view throughout the House that that would be helpful. To leave it until late next week, when inevitably we shall be up against the buffers, would be unfortunate.

Can the right hon. Lady give us any indication of her preferred timetable for reports from the Modernisation Committee? She will acknowledge the widespread concern throughout the House, particularly but not exclusively from Back-Bench Members, that we have been unable to make more progress in bringing forward recommendations for the House to consider.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand the hon. Gentleman's difficulty with the timing of the business statement. We all had rather short notice of that.

The whole House shares the view that the situation in Iraq is serious and is to be kept under review. It is entirely a matter for the Chair, and I do not wish in any way to pre-empt the decisions of the Chair, but this afternoon there is a debate on defence matters in which Members may find it possible to raise these issues, should they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I said, that is a matter for the Chair.

We anticipate that there will be debates on these matters in the aftermath of the Queen's Speech. I can assure the hon. Gentleman, however, that, whether or not there is a specific day on Iraq, the Government will certainly keep the House informed about developments, and will take seriously such a request should dramatic developments require such a decision.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the timetable for modernisation. I hope that, within this calendar year, the Modernisation Committee may be able to put some proposals to the House for consideration and decision.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): All hon. Members have received a letter from the relevant Foreign Office Ministers on Iraq to tell us how hideous Saddam Hussein is, with which we would all agree. However, there is no letter to tell us about the conditions of the Iraqi people, yet the intention is to bomb the Iraqi people, not Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein will not be concerned about what happens to his people. Should not we be concerned? Therefore, should we not have a specific and immediate debate on the situation in Iraq?

Mrs. Beckett: Everyone in the House shares my hon. Friend's concern for the Iraqi people, but I am confident that he knows that the responsibility for their condition lies squarely with Saddam Hussein and his immediate allies. Their difficulties with food and medicine shortages about which we are constantly told are entirely because of a decision made by the Government of Iraq. Nothing that the international community is doing prevents the people of Iraq from being much better treated. I heed my hon. Friend's words about the importance of keeping the situation in Iraq under review, and repeat the assurances that I have given to other hon. Members that the Government are very conscious of it in respect of the House.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I also apologise for arriving a couple of minutes late, because of the last-minute change of business.

Following several other questions, now that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and the Prime Minister are metaphorically in bed together, could we not explore in an urgent debate the important parliamentary and constitutional implications of this development? We must be told exactly what role the right hon. Member for Yeovil has in government, and how it alters the relationship between the Government party and an Opposition party, up to now, so-called.

How will this affect that party's rights in this House in terms of questioning and debates and the Chair calling its members? All these matters are of considerable importance. If the development is as important as both the Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Yeovil insisted on the radio this morning—the galactic future of the universe was the implication I got—surely we in this House should be able to debate it properly, and give our views of what is going on.

Mrs. Beckett: I have little—in fact, nothing—to add to what I have already told several hon. Members on this matter. I certainly cannot undertake to find time for a debate on it. I realise that, to many Members of the Conservative party, it must come as a devastating shock that mature politicians can agree about some things, as they cannot even agree among themselves.

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Concerns about the millennium bug were raised earlier. Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) has some difficulties of his own with information technology.

In view of the alarmist comment in the press earlier this week on the millennium bug, and given that the Leader of the House referred to a statement earlier, I wonder whether we are shirking our responsibility by not having a proper debate on the Government's preparations for the millennium bug. I believe that the Government have taken the problem seriously, in sharp contrast to the Conservative party, which had many years to prepare for the problem, particularly in respect of small and medium enterprises. May we have a debate in Government time on the problems of and preparations for the millennium bug?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the Government's preparations again. He is right to say that we substantially stepped up the procedures and preparations that we inherited from the Conservatives. I am prepared to be characteristically generous towards them and acknowledge that, as time goes on, it is more and more evident that everyone who is dealing with the issue realises that they should have started several years before they actually did. Certainly, those who began to make their preparations as long as ago as 1996 often now believe that it would have been better if they had begun earlier.

As long as the Conservative party refrains from trying to make silly points by trying to pretend that we diminished the programme that we inherited from it, I am prepared to recognise that it could not have been expected to foresee some of the issues that face us now. I cannot promise him that I will find time for a debate on the matter in the near future. As I told the hon. Member for South Staffordshire, I intend to keep the House informed and up to date about the Government's preparations.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): As the Government are committed to open government, and given the serious nature of the allegations in *The Sunday Times* and the whitewash by the Deputy Prime Minister, could the Leader of the House find time before we prorogue for a debate on early-day motion 1709—now, please?

[*That this House expresses serious concern about the lack of a credible explanation of the interference by the honourable Member for Mansfield, the former Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the current Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at that Department, in planning applications in areas 140 miles outside his constituency; questions whether it is normal practice for parliamentary private secretaries to take up issues in other honourable Members' constituencies and on subjects covered by the department for which they are a parliamentary private secretary; and urges a full disclosure by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions of all papers, minutes of meetings and discussions concerning the Barnet Football Stadium and Belmont Riding Centre planning applications and a full investigation of this deeply unsatisfactory situation.*]

Mrs. Beckett: I recall the early-day motion to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I think that he knows that the proper authorities in the House have made the inquiries that are called for, and that the matter has been cleared and my hon. Friend exonerated of any wrongdoing. If the hon. Gentleman seeks to substitute his judgment for that of the proper authorities, all I can say is that I am afraid that I have more confidence in the authorities than I have in him.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I make a House of Commons point? It used always to be the situation that, when a Minister went on an important, significant visit abroad, he or she reported to the House of Commons. Against that background, could we not have on Monday a factual report from the Secretary of State for Defence about what he said in the Gulf and what Gulf states said to him, in order to clear up something that is giving great concern? We are told that Arab states are privately in favour of military strikes, but publicly not a single Arab country, nor Iran for that matter, supports military action now or within the next month. At the very least, the House of Commons deserves to be told what the situation is on this matter.

Mrs. Beckett: On the general House of Commons point that my hon. Friend makes, I am not sure how far back he is harking. I say that with great respect; I am not in any way attempting to put my hon. Friend down. Certainly it is my own feeling that, of latter years, Ministers in all Governments have travelled so much more extensively than used to be the case that, while proper reports are always made to the House on visits of major importance, if we were to attempt to have a report every time a Minister went overseas, we would have difficulty finding time to do anything else.

I certainly take the serious point that my hon. Friend makes. I say to him, as I have said to others, that there is a debate on defence matters this afternoon, and, if my hon. Friend is fortunate enough to catch the Chair's eye, he may have an opportunity to raise the matter to which he refers. I can assure him and the House that the Government will continue to bring all proper information before the House on developments in Iraq.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Hardly a week goes by without some new revelation of disaster overcoming the project to rebuild and reorganise the Royal Opera house. Bernard Haitink, the musical director, has resigned, and there are rumours that Vivien Duffield, a major sponsor, is withdrawing funding. The artists are in disarray over what their contractual future will be. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to come to the House of Commons and tell us once and for all what on earth is going on with the project, before we find that the only performances to come from its newly constructed stages are farce?

Mrs. Beckett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State answered questions on Monday, and, although matters continue to be discussed and meetings continue to take place, there has been no dramatic new development since then.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): As regards talks with the Liberals, is it not a fact that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) tried to stay in office after the first election defeat in 1974 by trying to forge a coalition with the Liberals that did not come off? I am totally opposed to anything that might lead towards coalition government, and I have made my views clear.

[Mr. David Winnick]

May I ask my right hon. Friend this question about Iraq—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. That is as classic an example of a non sequitur as I have heard at business questions.

Mr. Winnick: As regards business next week—which might be a more appropriate way of putting it, Mr. Deputy Speaker—will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House bear in mind the necessity of a statement on Iraq? Although only one Labour Member has so far expressed a view, many of us believe that the Iraqi dictator has shown the most blatant defiance both of the agreement he signed at the end of the war in 1991 and of the further agreement which he signed with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in February, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) referred.

Is my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House aware that the brutal terror in Iraq continues? Reports that appear to be totally reliable have emerged stating that, only last month, 122 political prisoners were murdered in a prison just outside Baghdad. That is an illustration of the terror that continues in that country.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right in what he says, both about the situation in Iraq and about the way in which Saddam Hussein has continually broken his word, including most recently to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I can give him the assurance he seeks, that the Government will do everything we can to keep the House informed. I know that hon. Members are concerned about the condition of the Iraqi people; however, I understand that Iraqi television reveals that the leadership continue to be well fed.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Leader of the House give some guidance on how the Government intend to handle the Northern Ireland legislation, given that there are a significant number of amendments? Are we again to rush through the House legislation that we have not really thought out? In addition, I ask for a statement to be made in the near future that will allow the House to examine the implications of certain decisions taken in other places: for example, the attempt in Birmingham to camouflage Christmas by calling it "Winterval"; and the guidance being given to people in Northern Ireland that it is not right to display in places of work Christmas cards with scriptural texts on them, and that cars with GB plates showing that the owner has been abroad should not be parked in business car parks lest they cause offence. Surely that is carrying things to an unworthy extent?

Mrs. Beckett: It is my understanding that there might be a significant number of amendments to the Northern Ireland legislation, and I also understand that that causes concern. I assure the hon. Gentleman that one of the developments in the House that I have long deplored is the way in which, over the years, we have had more and more substantial numbers of amendments to legislation, instead of getting the legislation right in the first place. If we are able to implement some of the previous recommendations of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons in respect of pre-legislative scrutiny and so on, we might avoid that sort of thing in future.

However, I know that the hon. Gentleman recognises, as does the whole House, that the Northern Ireland legislation is a rather special case, having been devised over a relatively short period in order to deal with a fast-moving situation. In those circumstances, some amendment is inevitable. I fear that I am not familiar with the other issues he raises, but I assure him that opportunities to raise those matters in the House will continue to be available.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If any statement is to be made about the Lib-Lab arrangements, can my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House have a word with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister before it is made and explain to him that many of us are against making such tinpot arrangements with the rag, tag and bobtail sitting opposite?

Notwithstanding all that, even if someone was in favour of some sort of loose arrangement, the last thing to do would be to arrange matters with that broken reed of a man, the leader of the Liberal Democrats. The man is under challenge from at least three or four of his colleagues, and they are rowing among themselves.

May I remind my right hon. Friend that, between 1976 and 1978, there was a less loose arrangement of a Lib-Lab pact? It ended in tears, when the Liberals ran away with the ball and would not play any longer. The problem was that it got a little hot in the kitchen, and they could not stand it. They are totally unreliable, and the sooner we get rid of that barmy idea, the better. What is more, if it carries on for any length of time, stop their Short money.

Mrs. Beckett: I take that as a further request for a debate on the matter, which I am unable to grant.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is it possible for the Leader of the House to arrange a debate on the principles of democracy? That would give us an opportunity to discuss the supine way in which the leader of the Liberal Democrats is being led by the nose to the Cabinet table to get his marching orders from the Prime Minister.

It would also allow us to consider more closely and contrast the way in which the leader of the Conservative party in Wales was elected on Tuesday by one man, one vote, involving all party members, with what is happening in the Labour party in Wales. The Secretary of State for Wales, who showed no interest in the Welsh Assembly, is being parachuted in by the party leadership, who are complete control freaks and are afraid of someone else getting their hands on the reins in the Welsh Assembly. They are also considering giving the Labour party membership just half a say in the matter. Since when has democracy meant one person, half a vote?

Mrs. Beckett: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's final brilliant remark was lost on me, and as for his opening remark, I should have thought that somebody who was supine could not be led anywhere. The hon. Gentleman lectures the House on democracy. We need no lectures on that from the Conservative party. I remind the

hon. Gentleman that there would be no devolution and no such elections if Conservative Members had had their way.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I also ask my right hon. Friend seriously to consider having a debate on democracy, not on the drivel coming from the Conservative party but on House of Lords reform, so that we can finally put an end to the ludicrous ping-pong game that we are playing with important legislation at the moment.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. A good example of the Conservatives' attitude to democracy is that they agreed in 1911 that it was unsuitable for the hereditary principle to be a reason for membership of another place, but, 87 years later, they have not done a thing about it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I reinforce the requests from around the Chamber for an early statement on Iraq. The Leader of the House said that the situation was unchanged. She is perhaps unaware that, last night, the United Nations met to discuss the evacuation of personnel from the country. Will she ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to say whether any British nationals remain in Iraq, and assure us that we will not face a repetition of the Gulf war when Saddam Hussein made use of the so-called human shield?

Will the right hon. Lady also ensure that time is available to discuss the legal basis for possible British intervention, so that, if and when British forces are used to enforce the will of the UN and the international community, the whole House can be in agreement and give our forces the full support they deserve?

Mrs. Beckett: I find it inconceivable that there would be circumstances in which the House would not give support to British forces. All I can say to the hon. Lady is that we have continued meticulously to keep the House informed. I accept that discussions continue day by day, but the position remains unchanged, in that Saddam Hussein is in breach of his obligations and the Government continue to insist and reiterate with our allies that he must come back into compliance. I assure the hon. Lady and the House that every effort will be made to keep the House informed.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Following the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about Ministers who have been abroad coming back and telling us about their experiences, will the Leader of the House confirm that it is the intention of the Deputy Prime Minister, when he returns from slaving away in Buenos Aires, to give us a statement on carbon emissions and what progress has been made internationally on global warming?

Mrs. Beckett: As my hon. Friend says, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is in Buenos Aires, where discussions are continuing. I thank my hon. Friend for his concerns and his suggestion that a statement might be made in the House, but, as it is not yet clear what conclusions will come from those discussions, it is a little premature to conclude whether there will be material to report to the House. I shall bear his remarks in mind, and draw them to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Can the right hon. Lady really not find time for a debate on democracy? The problem is that the belief on the Treasury Bench seems to be that democracy is one man, one vote—so long as that man happens to be the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Beckett: On these Benches, the position is—and long has been—that we believe in one Member, one vote. Women have the vote in the Labour party.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we debate the report that emanated yesterday from the House of Lords, which was dismissed by the Home Office without a nanosecond of consideration? That report was delivered not by a group of drug-crazed teenagers but by senior scientists, and has been described as authoritative, compassionate and wise.

The message sent from Parliament—which conducts much of its activities in alcohol-drenched rooms that are filled with smoke—is that it is against drugs. Yesterday, Parliament re-declared its war on people with cancer or multiple sclerosis who suffer serious pain. Will the Government explain why they believe that those who seek relief from pain are criminals? Can we not examine the posture adopted by the Home Office, which many of us believe to be not only premature but deeply stupid and cruel?

Mrs. Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's long-standing concern about this matter. I understand also his concern for those who believe that this drug might help them. However, it is right and consistent that the Government should take the view that research must be carried out in this area. I accept that my hon. Friend believes that we should take a decision before the results of that research are known, but he will know that that is not the Government's view.

It has been made plain that, if and when a cannabis-based medicine is developed and shown to meet established standards in terms of safety and so on, the matter could be reconsidered. I understand my hon. Friend's concern—particularly for those who are in distress or pain—but the Government have considered the matter most carefully, and do not feel able to take the course of action that he recommends.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): May I echo the calls from both sides of the Chamber for a debate on the concordat between the Government and the Liberal party? That would provide an opportunity to explore fully the rumour circulating the Palace that the Liberals will have to rename themselves the Liberal doormat party.

Mrs. Beckett: I have nothing to add to what I said before about the unlikelihood of a debate on that matter.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a further debate on employee rights? Following the implementation of legislation such as the working time directive, some of my constituents have reported that some employers are trying to evade their

[Mr. Vernon Coaker]

responsibilities under those new directives. Indeed, some employees feel intimidated against acting to ensure that they secure their entitlements under the law. They are concerned that measures passed by this place will not be available to them because of threats by their employers.

Mrs. Beckett: It is always a source of concern if people feel that their rights may be at risk or that there is some danger of those rights being denied. My hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to the improvements that the Government have made in access to fair treatment at work. We shall continue to work on those matters.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Further to the pertinent inquiries by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), will the Leader of the House find time for an early statement or debate about the proposed allocation of Short money in light of the announced engagement between the Government and the Liberal Democrats?

The right hon. Lady will be aware that, to all intents and purposes, on the subjects of education, health, social security and European Union policy, the Liberal Democrats will not oppose the Government. Does the right hon. Lady agree that the purpose of Short money is specifically to assist the work of a major party that seeks to oppose the Government, and not to assist parties that are—metaphorically at least—kissing, cuddling and fawning over the Government?

Mrs. Beckett: I am touched by the enthusiasm of the Conservative party for Short money—which was, of course, introduced by a Labour Government to support the better working of the House, and which the Conservatives showed considerable reluctance to improve in any way when they were the Government and we were the Opposition.

The hon. Gentleman's entire question appears to be based on a false premise. If he believes that the Liberal party is supporting everything that we are doing on health and education, never mind on the handling of economic and monetary union, he has not been listening in this place.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): In response to earlier questions, the Leader of the House suggested that the proposed merger between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats was confined to some policy areas, or some departmental areas. May I add my voice to the calls for a proper debate on the implications of the merger? In those policy areas, it would obviously be inappropriate for them to have continued representation on Select Committees and other Committees of the House in the proportion that they have at the moment.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not know how the Conservative Opposition would manage if they were asked to take up more places on Committees, because—thanks to the judgment of the electorate—there are, comparatively speaking, so few Conservative Members. However, I repeat that I do not intend to find time for a debate on the matter; and as there has been no merger, there would be nothing to debate.

Sir Patrick Cormack: The right hon. Lady said that she got slightly lost with my second original question. Therefore, will she answer a specific point that I put to her? Can she name a single Labour Back Bencher who enthusiastically supports the closed-list system?

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, of course. That system is supported by all Labour Members, who are well aware that that it is simple and straightforward. However, the main point is that, if Conservative Members—as they do—continually talk about democracy, they make it plain that they do not understand it. The choices that were made on the operation of the system as it is to be applied to the European elections, were made democratically in the Labour party by members of our party, not by the leadership.

New Variant CJD

4.16 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement on the Government's reaction to new findings about the risks associated with new variant CJD.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): First, I apologise to the House for the delay in responding to this private notice question, which was caused by the fact that the computers in the Department went down when the young woman concerned was trying to type from my manuscript so that I could provide a decent copy for everyone.

Since I became Secretary of State, I have ensured that any recommendations from the experts who advise me on ways to reduce any risk of transmission of new variant CJD are implemented promptly and made public.

As far as I am aware, there are no new findings to report to the House about new variant CJD, but I can bring the House up to date on developments this year and the action that I have taken.

Following the development of BSE in the national herd and the identification of new variant CJD, the previous Government were advised that the human disease was probably linked to exposure to BSE. Since new variant CJD was identified, 31 cases have been notified to the Department of Health—three in 1995, 10 in 1996, 10 in 1997 and eight cases so far this year. Whenever there have been any new developments, I have sought expert advice on what I should do. I have taken that advice, instigated prompt action, found the necessary funds and made public what I have done.

In November 1997 I was advised that there was a possibility, however small, that new variant CJD could be transmitted through blood. I sought the expert advice of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, and warned the National Blood Authority that it should be prepared to take all necessary steps to introduce the removal of white blood cells from the blood supply—a process called leucodepletion—should that be necessary. I made that information public and said at the time that it was better to be safe than sorry.

In February, I was advised by the Committee on Safety of Medicines that, as a precautionary measure, the use of United Kingdom-sourced plasma in the manufacture of blood products should be phased out. The committee went on to review each individual blood product licence, and on 13 May confirmed that all those products should be manufactured from plasma sourced from abroad. I have already authorised that action, at an estimated cost of about £30 million. At the same time, the committee emphasised that until safe new supplies made from non-UK sources were available, it was essential to maintain sufficient supplies of UK products for the national health service.

Anti-D immunoglobulin is used on mothers who are rhesus negative to prevent the serious condition of haemolytic disease in newborn babies, which can lead to fatalities or the babies being seriously handicapped by cerebral palsy or deafness.

There has always been a worldwide shortage of anti-D immunoglobulin. It has therefore taken longer to obtain sources of plasma to use for anti-D from non-UK sources than in the case of other blood products. That was known to the Committee on Safety of Medicines when it gave its advice. The scarcity arises because the donors are rare and must be specially immunised before they can produce anti-D blood. That obviously takes time. Sources have now been identified and those products should be available in a few months.

In July, SEAC advised me that leucodepletion for blood transfusions might reduce the theoretical possibility of the transmission of nvCJD through blood, and the blood service has been instructed to introduce leucodepletion as soon as possible. I made that public; the estimated cost is £70 million.

One of the difficulties in handling this issue is that there is no known test for nvCJD and no certainty about the size of the epidemic. No one yet knows whether we face a small number of cases or a large number. Experts have been looking into that since cases were first identified.

Following the recent identification of prions in the appendix that had been removed from a patient who later died of nvCJD, I have asked scientists to draw up arrangements for a survey of human tissue held by hospitals throughout the country, in an effort to help to determine the extent of nvCJD in the general population. In line with our usual policies, that was announced on 27 August.

That discovery also raised the possibility of the transmission of nvCJD by surgical instruments during commonplace operations. SEAC advised that the risk was minimal, and to date I have not been advised to take any action on that aspect. The expert committees are reviewing the issue, and I will take any further action should they so advise. In the meantime, I have authorised work to identify measures that could be taken to reduce the risk of infection being transmitted by surgical instruments, should that be deemed necessary.

New variant CJD is a new disease which poses new problems. As I said, we have no idea of the extent of the disease or how it is transmitted. The advice that I receive tries to balance the risks of CJD, which are at present unquantifiable, with the certainty of death or injury if blood products and transfusions were not available or if surgery were restricted.

At all times, I have sought expert advice, acted promptly on that advice, made the advice public and found the necessary extra funds. Today, the Medicines Control Agency, following consultation with the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, stated:

"This is not a new story. The issues have been considered in depth by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines which has given its advice to the Government which has been fully followed. The Committee on the Safety of Medicines has kept the matter under continuous review and is satisfied with all the actions that have been taken."

Mr. Duncan: I accept the Secretary of State's apology for the delay, and I am grateful for his statement, but on this issue the devil is in the detail and there is still much more to learn.

Will the right hon. Gentleman now widen the scope of the national BSE-CJD inquiry to cover the handling of events since 1997? In particular, why did the Government choose to consider beef on the bone a much greater risk than that posed by surgical instruments, bearing in mind the fact that SEAC and the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens assessed the risks respectively as "minimal" and "very small"?

[Mr. Duncan]

Is it not the case that, in April, the right hon. Gentleman promised the House, as he sacked the head of the national blood service, that all British-derived blood products would be banned by September this year? Can he confirm that the Department of Health now privately concedes, as he appears now to have confirmed, that many of the potential sources of nvCJD transmission will continue to be used on NHS patients until next summer?

The right hon. Gentleman, in his response to my written question on autoclave sterilisation, recognised the expert guidance that routine sterilisation procedures are insufficient to destroy the infective agent of nvCJD. What action is his Department taking to modify autoclave practices to ensure the proper destruction of the prion protein in the light of this finding? His earlier written answer was brilliantly obtuse.

If the Department is aware that four of those who have so far died from nvCJD were also blood donors, what efforts has it made to trace and destroy this potentially infectious blood and all the associated products? Such action has already been taken in the United States; why not here as well?

We now also have two clusters of nvCJD infection, one near Ashford and one near Leicester. What assessment has the Department made of those clusters; and what efforts has it made to identify whether there is a common source for the infection?

Will the right hon. Gentleman today issue a list of all products that are at risk of contamination with nvCJD, and will he immediately ensure that alternatives to British-derived anti-D and gamma globulin are made available as soon as possible? Patients need to know the risks and they need to exercise an informed choice. We are dealing here with people, not cattle.

What happens if the risk is not theoretical and is proven? That is the very risk which has now been identified. In the meantime, thousands of women and others are being put at risk.

The right hon. Gentleman must not tell the House that, for a price, he can acquire anti-D. He must acquire it—will he now do so? And if there is no shortage of gamma globulin, why has he not already acquired it?

My recent written questions to the Department and work done by the *Daily Express* have, I detect, flushed out some reluctance to make a clear statement to the House, and has shown a Department that is near paralysed in deciding what to do.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that funds will be specially available and that no NHS trust will be financially burdened as a result of tackling the problem?

There are clearly problems of which the general public has, until now, been unaware, and which have caused profound consternation within the Department. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I have been asking parliamentary questions now for more than a fortnight, and it is only the Opposition's questions which have induced him to make this long overdue statement.

I have already written to the right hon. Gentleman and today the issue has been raised in the House. We will co-operate with him fully, but today we want answers to these questions. Will he give a personal undertaking to keep Britain fully informed at all stages?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman started off on the right lines when he said that we have much more to learn. I made that clear in my statement. We do not know how many people are suffering from nvCJD and it is unlikely that we will know for several years, despite the efforts of scientists who were put on to the job by my predecessors. That is no criticism of either the scientists or my predecessors. It is a difficult task. Furthermore, we do not know how new variant CJD arises or is transmitted, so it is extremely difficult to deal with.

However, it is simply not true that any truthful information that has appeared recently in the newspapers is new. All the information that I have given today, and all the information that has appeared in the newspapers, has come from information that I have deliberately placed on the public record since November last year when this issue first arose, because I am determined to ensure that everyone knows as much as the Department of Health about new variant CJD and how we may or may not be able to deal with it.

Thus, no new information is available. Information has been made available by me or my Department at every stage in the proceedings. On receiving advice, we have acted on it and, with the help of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, have found the money to do everything that we have been advised to do. There is no question of not finding the money or of anything being held back because of lack of funds; but there are practical problems in getting from abroad plasma that can be used in blood products. I freely admit that that has proved to be more difficult than I was advised it would be when I told the House that I hoped that everything would be done by September this year. I regret that everything was not done by September, but I accept the practical problems and delays that have arisen.

On the sterilisation of equipment, as I said in my statement, which the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) appeared to ignore, I have already asked my officials to get on as best they can with looking at ways of preventing or reducing the likely spread of new variant CJD through medical instruments, in case the experts advise me to do that. That includes looking not just at autoclaves but at other methods of sterilisation and, in some cases, possibly changing the design and structure of instruments used during operations. Some of them, however, are immensely complex and would be difficult to make any safer or less liable to carry infections.

As for the 31 people who have died from new variant CJD, the latest figure that I have is that four of them had donated blood. That blood has been tracked down and, where it was not used, it has been destroyed. We are therefore not remiss compared with other countries: we got on with that.

SEAC is looking into the Ashford and Leicestershire clusters to see whether there appears to be a pattern or an explanation for them. To date, it has been unable to come up with an explanation. One of the problems with new variant CJD is that explanations are thin on the ground because no one has yet formulated them.

In trying to ensure that the public know the risks, I have made every bit of information that has been available to me available to them. The problem is that I cannot assess the risks, and nor can the public, because we do not know the incidence of new variant CJD. We do not know whether the risk is high or low. No one can make any sort of formulation. When I arrived in the Department I asked whether there were any estimates and was told that computer modelling had been done by scientists. The figures ranged from 30 to several hundred thousand cases. My view was that those were not computer models but guesses. They may have been sophisticated guesses, but that is what we are reduced to.

We have no way of identifying the risks. I emphasise again that people who have suffered serious injury and need major surgery, or are in a condition that requires the replacement of their blood or the use of a blood product, face immediate death or injury if they do not get treatment using blood products or a blood transfusion.

We are doing our best to make sure that blood products and blood used in transfusions are as safe as possible. The experts who advise me are trying to balance out the unquantifiable risk of transmitting new variant CJD against the certainty that people who need a massive blood transfusion will die if they do not get it. We are cleaning up blood products and the blood supply as quickly as possible, and the only restraint is the practicalities—it is nothing to do with finance, and it has been nothing to do with Government delays.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): I declare both a personal and a constituency interest: first, a family in my constituency tragically lost one of its members to new variant CJD; secondly, like many women in my constituency, I have recently had an anti-D injection.

Although I recognise the hard work that has undoubtedly been carried out in the Department of Health by my right hon. and hon. Friends, does my right hon. Friend accept that uncertainty surrounding the safety of anti-D injections will result in some women refusing them, thereby putting future pregnancies at risk? Can he assure me that swift action will be taken to ensure the safety of the anti-D injection, to protect women and babies?

Mr. Dobson: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance—the swiftest possible action is being taken. Women who are faced with the choice should seek the advice of the clinicians who are dealing with them and, if they feel so inclined, take that advice. I cannot give general advice from the Dispatch Box, because it will be dependent in part on the needs and circumstances of each woman, and it is up to her and her clinician to decide what is best. I wish that they did not face that dilemma, but they do, and we are trying to deal with it as fast as humanly possible.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, or the new variant, is a ghastly disease, and I welcome the Government's response to today's question.

It is important that people realise that science does not have the answer to every question, and that there is uncertainty, but it is also important that people be given facts. They should be given facts in a balanced way, however, and I despair at headlines such as "230,000 at risk from CJD jab". Apparently, that was published at the instigation of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). It is disgraceful to use such a serious issue purely for party political purposes—especially for a party that denies that there is any risk whatever.

There is just as much uncertainty over eating beef on the bone. Conservative Members were right when they said that the Government were overreacting on beef on the bone, but they cannot have it both ways. They cannot, on the one hand, say, "We've got to do everything to be as sure as possible"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I must remind the hon. Gentleman that he should be putting a question to the Secretary of State.

Dr. Brand: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Does the Secretary of State agree that the way this issue has been presented is not in the interest of the public health of this nation? There may be uncertainty over some blood products, but there is absolute certainty about the risk of hepatitis acquired abroad and about the handicapping and death of rhesus babies. It is frightfully important that we get this absolutely right, and I welcome the way the right hon. Gentleman is treating that particular concern.

Mr. Dobson: I thank the doctor for a question based on his professional knowledge and concern. What I do not like is the challenge which some of the coverage represents to the integrity of a substantial number of hard-working people who are trying their level best to identify the level of risk and how we deal with it—not to mention a substantial number of public officials who have rightly been used to the idea that our blood supplies were generally better and safer than any supplies elsewhere in the world.

These people have been forced by circumstances for which neither they nor we are responsible to seek alternative sources for plasma from abroad, in some cases from countries that we would not normally have associated with particularly high standards of blood supplies. But they have been determined—and I have backed them up—that, when plasma is sought from, in particular, the United States, both premises and processes must be vetted in advance by experts from the Medicines Control Agency to ensure that the supplies meet our standards. All that takes time, but it is time well spent if we can ensure that alternative supplies are as safe as it is possible to make them, in the face of a problem which—as I have said—has arisen through the fault of no one in the Chamber, and which is, at the moment, literally unquantifiable.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My right hon. Friend is dealing with a subject that we all well understand will be difficult to explain fully. There will be a lot of uncertainty about putting out messages when perhaps they should be held back. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that one thing is certain? When the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) talked of putting down a few questions, it crossed my mind that it would have been very handy if a few Tory Back Benchers had put down a few questions in the past, when certain things were happening under a Tory Government who allowed this scandal to continue.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Does my right hon. Friend recall that we had not just one ministerial statement on that fateful day, but two? Such was the enormity of the problem—the Tories had covered it up for so long—that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Health had to answer questions on the same day. I have never seen that happen before, in all the 28 years I have been a Member of Parliament. Now the Tories are coming along and trying to give the impression that a Labour Government are at fault.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the British people will consider the issue to be a question of trust? They did not trust the Tories in this regard; they kicked them out. They will agree with my right hon. Friend in that, as long as Ministers are straight and transparent and make statements to the House, they will believe what those Ministers say.

Mr. Dobson: I can tell my good and hon. Friend that, ever since I began my current job, I have tried to ensure that all information on matters such as this is made public as soon as reasonably possible. I have followed that to the letter. I have been so anxious to ensure that written questions receive accurate answers that I have insisted on their being vetted by the Chief Medical Officer himself, so that the answers are accurate, professionally sound and based on information that has been checked by someone whose integrity is unchallengeable.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I note that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is sitting on the Front Bench near the Secretary of State. Will the Secretary of State confirm that his statement has no implications for British farmers, and will he reaffirm his confidence in British beef?

Mr. Dobson: Yes, indeed. I think that my good, close and right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture is sitting here because he is a friend of mine—and I am glad that he is.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What are the prospects of developing a test for CJD in blood donations? I know that a prion is different from a virus, but I understand that blood donations are screened for HIV and hepatitis. Given the history of BSE, should not the former Government, 10 years ago, have put 10 times as much effort into developing a test for BSE in live animals?

Mr. Dobson: I am here to answer questions on behalf of the present Government, and in relation to my stewardship. I can only say that substantial scientific efforts are being put into identifying a biopsy test for CJD. At present, it is only possible to be sure that someone died of new variant CJD by examining the brain after death; so any steps that can be taken to develop a test are very welcome.

As I said, all this has been going on since before we came to office. I hope that the scientists will come up with something, but it is proving very difficult, just as it has proved very difficult to come up with a live test for BSE. The sooner we can discover such a test, the better: it would transform the situation, because it would enable blood supplies and so forth to be made a good deal safer. We have provided funds. I believe, for instance, that we are providing funds for Dr. Dealler, who is occasionally quoted in the newspapers. He is looking for a test, but as yet he has not found one.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The House will have noted the Secretary of State's comments about the need to advise the public about the degrees of risk associated with CJD. In answer to a question about beef on the bone, the Minister for Public Health told me that the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee had said—in relation to the inadvisability of beef on the bone continuing to be sold—

"that there was a 95 per cent. chance of no cases of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease and a 5 per cent. chance of one case arising from this exposure in 1998."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. *84*.]

The next day, 14 July 1998, the Minister said that, reporting on peanut allergy, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment had said that it was "potentially life-threatening", and advised that families with a history of allergic disease should avoid peanuts as a "sensible precautionary measure".

Is the Secretary of State satisfied that his Department is being entirely consistent and evenhanded in taking measures to deal with risks to human health across the board?

Mr. Dobson: Yes.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Does not this sorry episode demonstrate the frailty of human knowledge? Does it not show that scientists do not know the answers to many of the questions that trouble us, including the question of the interaction of animal and human health?

I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's statement. I note that he has been meticulous in taking measures to deal with public health, that he has been open about the process and that he has consulted, and then followed medical advice to the letter. Does that not contrast with the behaviour of Opposition Members who were in charge at the beginning of the affair?

Mr. Dobson: I do not really want to go into that. Let me just say that I think officials in my Department are better pleased to be operating under a regime that tells the truth and tells it quickly, acts on the advice that it receives and finds the funds to make that possible. They do seem, from time to time, to contrast that regime with what they had to put up with before.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Has the Department of Health been able to establish how many of the 31 known victims of new variant CJD had had operations or invasive surgery on the national health service? If so, has the Secretary of State taken any action to trace other people who may be at risk after such surgery?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman asks a perfectly sensible question. The CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh is carrying out minute examinations of the medical history of all the 31 people who have died—the 31st was announced today. One person—the one from Torbay—had an appendix removed prior to developing any symptoms of new variant CJD as it was understood at the time. Prions that could be related to new variant CJD were identified in material from that appendix, which, in line with the practice of every hospital, was preserved for precisely such survey purposes.

The unit is now examining the histories of the 30 other people, but I do not have the latest information on whether those people had had operations immediately before it was noticed that they may have been suffering from CJD or new variant CJD.

Points of Order

4.51 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It may not have been drawn your attention that the detailed, important and complicated answer given by the Secretary of State for Health this afternoon—which we all welcome—was made available in its full text to the media but not to Front-Bench or Back-Bench Members. It is extremely difficult for hon. Members to deal with such a statement in those circumstances.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Madam Speaker has on a number of occasions pointed out that it is helpful if hon. Members have the fullest information as early as possible. I understand that there was a particularly difficult situation in the Department of Health this afternoon, which may have contributed to the problem.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My understanding of custom and practice is that when Ministers make a statement, that statement is made available, but when they are responding to a private notice question, the text is not usually made available to hon. Members. I have no reason to deny any of the information to anyone. I shall obviously have to consult the business managers on whether any changes should be made in the practice that we inherited from the previous Government, which they, no doubt, inherited from the Government before them. It has always been customary to make the information available to the press.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will it now be a convention that answers to questions are given to the Press Gallery before they are given to hon. Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Secretary of State and, indeed, the Leader of the House will have heard those exchanges. I should tell hon. Members that I did not have a copy of the answer either.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been a Member of this House for 36 years and it is painful to express unhappiness at the judgment of someone who has been a parliamentary colleague for a quarter of a century and a political friend for 30 years. We have had a statement on CJD, which I do not doubt is important, but a request was also made for an urgent response to yesterday's meeting of the emergency committee of the United Nations. That meeting could lead to the bombing of infrastructure, which is a matter of enormous urgency.

Will you convey to the Speaker our absolute dismay? Before bombs rain down on Iraqi infrastructure, the House of Commons should at least have the opportunity

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to pursue the facts. I had better not try to camouflage the fact that this is a criticism of the Speaker. It comes from the third most senior Member—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As the hon. Gentleman said, he has been a Member of this House for a long time, but I am obliged to refer him to "Erskine May", which states:

"Neither the submission of a private notice question nor its subsequent rejection by the Speaker should . . . be publicly referred to."

That must be an end to the matter.

The Royal Navy

[Relevant documents: The Eighth Report from the Defence Committee of Session 1997–98, on the Strategic Defence Review (HC 138-I).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

4.54 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. Doug Henderson): It is a great privilege to open this debate on the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, the first on the subject since February 1996. I begin by paying tribute to the impressive qualities of those who serve in the those forces. I have seen those qualities at naval establishments across the United Kingdom, from the Clyde submarine base in the north to Plymouth and Poole in the south, and on warships—I was on board HMS Westminster when she was undergoing operational sea training. I have seen the commitment to duty, to the proud traditions of the service and to the central role that our naval forces play in safeguarding the freedoms that we all enjoy.

As I have visited ships and bases around the country, I have been struck by the professionalism, dedication, enthusiasm and team spirit of everyone whom I have met. Those qualities are at the core of the success of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines. They are embodied in an ethos on which the foundations of our naval service depend.

Royal Navy ships continue to be widely deployed around the world in support of our defence missions and tasks. On an average day, up to 60 per cent. of ships are on operations away from their base port. Their contribution is immense, ranging from the maintenance of the continuous at-sea deterrent patrol and our contribution to the NATO standing naval forces to fishery protection.

In the past year, the Navy and the Marines have been ready to assist in the evacuation of British citizens from countries where their lives may have been at risk—Sierra Leone, Albania, Indonesia and the Congo. Naval forces have assisted in counter-drugs operations, both in the United Kingdom and overseas. The fact that that commitment is now included as a military task is a reflection of the high priority that the Government attach to the fight against illegal drugs trafficking.

The Royal Navy is also involved in ensuring the security of our overseas territories. The programming of ships to the Atlantic patrol task will result in greater flexibility but will not be detrimental to a visible presence, when it is required, in the south Atlantic, in the Caribbean or off west Africa. Operations in the Caribbean are primarily focused on counter-drugs operations but they also enable the Navy to respond to natural disasters during the hurricane season. The House will be aware that, in the past month, HMS Sheffield has provided humanitarian relief in the West Indies following Hurricanes George and Mitch, which had such devastating effects in central American, especially in Honduras.

Our operational structures change as the situation changes. All our armed forces have recognised the importance of joint action, and I commend the Royal Navy for its forward-thinking and open-minded approach in the strategic defence review. It considered first and foremost how it could evolve to enhance its contribution to overall defence. It thought joint, not single

service. The new concept recognises the unpredictable nature of today's world and the importance of being able to respond quickly to a crisis with joint and rapidly deployable forces; it recognises the reach, self-sufficiency and independence from host nation support that characterise maritime forces.

The Navy has already established Joint Force 2000—which the House discussed in our debate two or three weeks ago—with colleagues in the Royal Air Force, and it will come into operation next year. Joint Force 2000 will build on the successful experience of joint Harrier operations at sea to enhance the power projection capability of the Invincible class carriers. The force will be part of RAF Strike Command, with a Royal Navy rear admiral at its head but an RAF air commodore in day-to-day charge.

In the longer term, we will build on the Joint Force 2000 experience when the future carrier-borne aircraft comes into service on the new carriers in 2012, in line with current planning. There are other examples of jointery: 3 Commando Brigade is already an inherently joint force with Army units permanently under Royal Marines command. Jointery will also be utilised beyond the front line in logistics and materiel support.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Minister told us that he was proud of the Navy's examination of how it could increase its contribution to defence through the strategic defence review. How can cutting three frigates and two nuclear attack submarines—SSNs—help to achieve that?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer to that, because he sat through the strategic defence review debate, in which we considered our future defence needs. It was recognised that, as a choice had to be made, our priority was to be able to deploy frigates in a concentrated way, rather than having the ocean coverage that is provided by the existing 35 frigates.

The same logic applies to SSNs. The hon. Gentleman will know that the emphasis of the design of the armed forces for the future, including the Navy, is to meet the operational needs that we think that the country will have. We believe that we will need a rapidly deployable force, and we have acted accordingly.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Will the Minister confirm that, right at the beginning of the strategic defence review, the Government said that there would be no more money for defence, so it did not matter what were the results of the SDR, or what were our foreign policy requirements? As there was no more money, the armed forces had to trim what they wanted to do.

Mr. Henderson: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman raises the subject of cuts in defence. I cannot recall how many such cuts were made by the previous Government, but I think that the cumulative effect was about a 30 per cent. cut over their last 10 years in office. I will not take any lessons from Conservative Members on cuts in defence. The SDR considered the allocation that is possible and that will meet our defence requirements, and we will choose priorities within that framework.

The Royal Navy provides our independent strategic nuclear deterrent, in the shape of the Trident force, which provides the fundamental guarantee of our security. Our reliance on nuclear weapons has, of course, radically reduced since the end of the cold war, but the strategic defence review confirmed that nuclear deterrence still has a unique and essential contribution to make to our security and that of our allies.

The deterrent prevents nuclear coercion against us—we should never forget that there are a great many nuclear weapons in the world—and I believe that it will contribute to preserving peace and stability in Europe as we work towards global verifiable nuclear disarmament. With the withdrawal of our last remaining free-fall nuclear bombs, the Royal Navy now operates our only nuclear weapon system.

In the new strategic setting, we have been able to reduce the readiness of our trident force while maintaining continuous at-sea deterrent patrols. As a measure of our commitment to further nuclear de-escalation, the notice period regulating the operation of our nuclear weapons has been increased.

I know that the House will want to put on record our appreciation of the work of our Trident submariners. Any of us who have visited submarines will recognise the difficult conditions in which submariners work to serve their country.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): As my hon. Friend knows, Trident submarines are a familiar sight in my constituency. I want to know about the code of conduct governing the passage of those submarines through our traditional fishing grounds. On 21 August, an incident took place involving a nuclear submarine and affecting seven fishing vessels from Tarbert, Loch Fyne. A meeting was held on 22 October to discuss the incident. I pleaded with the Tory Government for years and years to have a code of conduct. Can we now have a review of that code and a revision of its rules, in the interests of our fishermen?

Mr. Henderson: I can reassure my hon. Friend that I take very seriously the code governing the way in which our submarines enter the Clyde—and elsewhere—on the way to the bases. I visited Faslane a few weeks ago and discussed the matter with naval personnel. I am not aware of the specific incident to which my hon. Friend refers. I shall look into it and write to him, but I can reassure him now about the principle: we want the highest safety standards to ensure that submarines do not collide with fishing boats or their kit.

I believe that we can improve submariners' conditions of service. The Royal Navy is investigating how such improvements, including the possibility of more port visits, can be made. I hope that the House will welcome the launch in September of the fourth Trident submarine. It has ensured our ability to guarantee a capability to maintain continuous patrols over the lifetime of the Trident force.

Defence diplomacy is increasingly important for all our armed services. HMS Marlborough's visit to Syria and HMS Somerset's visit to St. Petersburg are important examples of that work.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will deal with the major part of procurement issues at the end of the debate, but I should like to refer to some of our equipment needs. In the strategic defence review, we stated our belief in a

[Mr. Henderson]

world-class Navy equipped to do the job. We have to continue to modernise and improve our equipment. I can assure the House that we are doing that.

The type 23 frigate is one of the most modern surface combatants in the world. With the last three in the class currently in build, the type 23 will form the backbone of the Navy's surface fleet well into the next century.

HMS Ocean, our new helicopter assault ship, brings a new dimension to amphibious operations: an area in which the Royal Navy has unparalleled experience and expertise. We all witnessed the contribution that HMS Ocean made to the humanitarian effort in central America.

The Navy's air capability has benefited immensely from the upgrade of the Sea Harrier aircraft, and from the ability to fly Royal Air Force Harriers from the Invincible class carriers. The highly capable Merlin helicopter—representing the state of the art in naval rotary-wing aviation—enters service next month. Beneath the waves, our Swiftsure and Trafalgar class submarines remain among the quietest, most capable nuclear-powered submarines in operation today.

The strategic defence review confirmed current plans for future equipment as follows—three new astute class submarines to replace the swiftsure class; two new assault ships to replace HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid; and two auxiliary oilers to replace the current Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service ships, Olwen and Olna. We have plans to replace the type 42 destroyer; to update all our submarines to make them capable of firing Tomahawk cruise missiles; and for a further four roll on/roll off ships that can provide the strategic lift we need to enable us quickly to deploy leading elements of the joint rapid reaction force.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I served in the original HMS Fearless, when it operated as a landing platform dock, for a short while when she was first commissioned. I notice that the Government will rightly replace the two LPDs with two further ships. Why, therefore, have the Government planned for only one new helicopter carrier—HMS Ocean—when that ship has already been used during its trials period? It is imperative that we have at least two helicopter assault carriers, and I ask the Minister to reconsider that point.

Mr. Henderson: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I hope that he understands that we have to have priorities and make choices. We cannot have everything in this world. HMS Ocean is an excellent vessel, which is in trials at the moment, and will serve us all well. We have plans for two further carriers that will provide many of the facilities that Ocean provides, and many others. Those carriers, which were the subject of much discussion during the debate on the strategic defence review, are an essential part of our modern provision. They will carry a more powerful force of future carrier-borne aircraft—the successor to the Harrier.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Minister referred to the Tomahawk and I believe that we have a Tomahawk capability in the Gulf off Iraq. Can the Minister confirm that the information that is crucial to the targeting of the Tomahawk comes from UNSCOM?

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend will understand that I am not prepared to cover such issues in today's debate. I am happy to discuss the principles of targeting, but I am not prepared to go into detail and I know that the House does not expect me to do so.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow) *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: I wish to make some progress.

I shall now deal with the issue of people in the Navy. The House has recognised previously that people are our most important asset in the armed forces and that is certainly true of the Navy. We put people first. We need to recruit more people into the Navy. We are currently 2,000 people short and we must close that gap. We shall do so by offering a first-choice career to those who have the potential to form part of our naval force.

The main shortfall categories are now among operator mechanics, Royal Marines and Sea Harrier pilots. The shortfall is being tackled on several fronts, but it will take some time to turn round. Our target is to achieve full staffing in the naval service by 2002.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Some 27 Harrier pilots requested to leave the service early in the past 12 months. Has the Minister discovered the reasons behind those requests from people who have been trained to a high level of proficiency? What can he do to get people, especially pilots, to stay in the Navy once they are fully trained?

Mr. Henderson: That is an important question and it has no easy answers. At the moment, we face an increase in demand for civil aviation pilots, and many—if not all—of the Navy's pilots have skills that make them an attractive proposition to any airline that is short of pilots. If the airlines are prepared to put a lot of goodies on the table—as I used to say when I was involved in industrial relations—it is hard for pilots to turn them down and hard for us to respond. We have recognised the problem; special arrangements have applied to pilots in the past, and that will probably continue. I assure the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) that the Government are doing what they can.

There is no single way to improve recruitment. A number of different approaches are necessary, ranging from national campaigns to targeted action on the ground, but we must be straight in what we say to potential recruits. Reality must match their perception. I hope that the wearing of uniforms in public will help to raise public confidence in our Navy.

The retention of trained personnel is also important. I have already mentioned Harrier pilots, but the Navy provides several other occupations that have alternatives in the civilian sector.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): What steps is the Minister taking to eliminate the constant drip-drip of scandal involving the deployment of Wrens at sea? Will he accept that such scandals undermine the ability of the Royal Navy to recruit the calibre of staff to which he refers?

Mr. Henderson: I do not whole-heartedly accept the hon. Gentleman's point. Much of the media can make

scandal where there is none, and they can get a small amount of scandal out of all proportion. I do not believe that there is more scandal in the relationships in any of our armed forces than among the population generally and I am taking steps to establish whether that is so.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park) *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: I shall give way for the last time, because I wish to make progress more quickly.

Dr. Tonge: If recruitment is a problem for the Royal Navy, would it be helpful to lift the ban on homosexuals? Indeed, should not that ban be lifted in all the armed forces?

Mr. Henderson: As the hon. Lady knows, the Government have given a commitment that the policy on homosexuals serving in our armed forces will be discussed by the House in this Parliament. When we come to that debate, it is important that I ensure that the House is aware of all operational requirements so that it can take them into account when making its decision.

Earlier this week, we held a very successful equal opportunities conference. General Colin Powell was the keynote speaker and we heard also from Sir Herman Ouseley and Kamlesh Bahl. The conference took learning from experience as its theme, and it enabled the Government, and the armed forces, to underline, once again, the seriousness with which we view equal opportunities. The guarantee of an equal opportunities environment in the Navy is an important part of making sure that the reality meets the objective. People expect a working environment that promotes equality and fairness, and prejudice of any kind has no place in the Royal Navy. I know that the naval staff of all ranks are now taking part in our equal opportunity education at Shrivenham and I hope that that will make a telling contribution to improving the working environment.

We need more recruits from all of our communities, including more men and women from black and Asian communities. The most recent recruitment figures show a significant improvement. The number of black and Asian people who now want to join the Navy has increased from 1 to 2 per cent., although that is still unacceptably low. It is a major motivation of mine to give further momentum to that improvement. Our efforts were recognised last week when the naval service won a number of awards at the 1998 British diversity awards ceremony. The Second Sea Lord received a gold award and the work of other naval personnel in the recruitment of minorities was also recognised. I was especially pleased that the tri-service efforts to raise diversity awareness received recognition in the form of a gold award.

Women comprise 7.4 per cent. of the Navy, and they fill a wide range of posts. We announced in the SDR that we wanted to continue to maximise opportunities for women in all three services. We have opened up to women a further 1,300 specialist posts attached to the Royal Marines, which are filled by Royal Navy and Army personnel. We shall consider the position of women's service in submarines and as mine clearance divers.

The inquiry rate from members of the black and Asian community to join the service continues to increase. The recruiting target for this year was set at 2 per cent. for those candidates, and we have hit it. We are also on track to hit that target for ethnic candidates for both officers and ratings.

Mr. Gill: Does not the process of setting targets for the recruitment of minorities sound very much like positive discrimination?

Mr. Henderson: It is not positive discrimination, but a recognition that we cannot fill all Navy posts unless we make them more attractive to a broader cross-section of our population. We shall not do that unless we go out to the whole community to say, "This is what it is like in the Navy. Come and join us." Our recruitment team is going out to communities from which we have historically been unable to attract people to the Navy. We are telling people that they can have a great life, and a first-choice career in the Navy. They can receive a good education, and we will take a zero-tolerance view of discrimination. We are beginning to have a an impact in those communities, bit by bit.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: No more.

I am pleased that our participation in the Notting Hill carnival was important in building links with ethnic communities. The service deals harshly with discrimination, as should any responsible employer, and it continues to review policies and practices so that they remain relevant and consistent with good employment practice. As in the other two services, a freephone harassment helpline has been introduced, and service personnel and their families may use it.

Following the strategic defence review, we have taken steps to improve education facilities for service personnel. New training and education initiatives will enable personnel to gain key skills and transferable qualifications for their return to civilian life. We also plan to introduce a scheme that will allow personnel to claim learning credits, which will offer financial support to service people for a learning purpose, both while they are serving and for some time afterwards.

As part of our welfare measures, we have established a families task force, which will address particular problems faced by service families in choosing housing and children's education. That is in line with our policy of caring for our people. Additionally, I am delighted to announce that we plan to give recognition and support to an association for Royal Navy and Royal Marines families. A number of naval families have expressed a wish to have an association to help represent their views and concerns, and the Navy is now working with them to help develop and agree their charter. They will be provided with headquarters accommodation, communication facilities and help with funding. The new association will be based in Plymouth.

The association should help dialogue between the naval service and naval families. It will be an adjunct to existing information and advice centres for wives and the naval personal and family service, which already provide community and personal support to families.

I shall say a word about the importance of our naval reserves and their contribution to operations. That contribution was fully recognised by the strategic defence

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review, and the capability of both the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Marines Reserve will be significantly enhanced as a direct result of recommendations arising from the review. The staffing ceiling of the Royal Naval Reserve has been increased from 3,500 to 3,850—an increase of 10 per cent.—to enable reservists to be more widely available across the fleet.

As a result of the Reserve Forces Act 1996, we are now able to utilise reservists in a much more flexible way. Full-time reserve service, for example, is a relatively new form of reserve service which enables reservists to be employed to fulfil the same range of duties as a regular service person. That has proved to be an extremely valuable and well-utilised form of service with some 150 members of the Royal Naval Reserve employed in that way. They work alongside their regular service colleagues, both afloat and ashore, for periods of up to two years at a time.

Royal Naval Reserve personnel from the seaman, air, medical, interrogator and intelligence branches have supported, and continue to support, operations in Bosnia during the past year. The Royal Marine Reserve will continue to reinforce the regular Royal Marines command when required and provide a valuable nationwide infrastructure for regeneration and reconstitution in times of national emergency. As with the Royal Navy Reserve, a number of Royal Marine reservists are currently serving full time with their parent service or with the Royal Navy.

The strategic defence review has confirmed the place of our maritime and amphibious forces at the centre of the defence enterprise. We have backed that up with the equipment and the policies the Navy needs to do the job. The Navy has emerged from the review with a much more clearly defined concept of operations, a plan for a powerful and balanced front line, increased funding for some aspects of support and a strategy for dealing with the problems of overstretch. The result will be a naval service well prepared to face the challenges of the 21st century. The Navy and Marines deserve the House's support. I hope that it will get that support today.

5.25 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I welcome this debate, the third of the single service debates that have become part of the annual tradition of Parliament. May I chide the Minister ever so gently for the fact that four of the five days for defence debates have occurred during the past three and a half weeks?

Mr. Doug Henderson *indicated assent.*

Mr. Maples: For his team's sake as well as my own I hope that we may be able in future to spread the debates a little more evenly over the year.

Mr. Henderson: I hope to meet the hon. Gentleman's wishes in that regard.

Mr. Maples: We have found something on which we can agree. I hope that not all the debates will fall on a Thursday—or at least on days such as today on which the North Atlantic Assembly is meeting, which may affect people's ability to attend.

I welcome discussions with the Government and with other parties on whether a proper format for the five days of defence debates might not continue to be two days for debate on the estimates, with the other three days perhaps split slightly differently so that each one does not necessarily focus on a single service. We are open to suggestion on that.

Events in Iraq are certainly hotting up. The Navy would be involved in action there. I do not intend to deal with Iraq in my speech, because the Minister clearly cannot deal with them tonight. However, if and when our forces go into action in the Gulf, I hope that there will be an immediate statement by the Secretary of State in the House so that we can cross-question him on what is happening, and on what policy is being pursued.

I have already apologised to Madam Speaker, and now do so to the House, for the fact that I have a long-standing speaking engagement—arranged before the debate was arranged—and I shall not be able to stay for the whole debate or to return for the winding-up speeches. I shall eagerly collect *Hansard* tomorrow to read the speeches that I have not heard.

Since the end of the cold war, we have seen a fundamental change in defence policy. Nowhere has that been more true than in our naval strategy. In some ways, we are returning to a more traditional defence policy of expeditionary forces and the use of naval power to support land operations. The 20th century has been somewhat continentalist, dominated by continental powers such as Germany, Russia and China, and that has dictated British naval planning and deployment. We were previously the great practitioner of maritime strategy based on naval predominance and expeditionary operations. From world war one, that changed. Continental issues dominated, and our naval strategy changed accordingly.

Since the end of the second world war, our naval deployment has been almost entirely configured for anti-submarine warfare in the north Atlantic, designed for the essential task of keeping open supply and communication lanes, and helping to maintain access to Europe for the United States fleet. The end of the cold war has, at least for the time being—though I doubt for all time—ended that continentalist situation. We no longer have to configure and deploy our forces solely to meet the Warsaw Pact threat. The new strategic environment demands the ability to respond flexibly and quickly outside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation area. We must be able to respond to threats and challenges not only in Europe, but in the middle east, the Gulf and north Africa. That will involve joint force operations in conjunction with allies. Such a concept is far from new, but it was largely irrelevant during the cold war.

Forces will have to be able to provide a wide range of options: the ability to deploy, respond and reconfigure rapidly and flexibly, offering a range of military options to policy planners. Navies cannot respond as quickly as air forces or provide the territorial presence of an army, but those are not always the most important qualities required. Navies can reach most of the world. They can engage and disengage rapidly. They are largely self-sufficient. They can operate aircraft and land forces. They can operate without host nation approval or support. They can switch quickly from a diplomatic to an aggressive role. Those concepts have increasingly come

to influence defence policy over the past six years or so and they are carried forward in the strategic defence review.

We can already deploy a brigade-sized force. RAF GR7s can operate from carriers. HMS Ocean will add a whole new dimension. We can deploy a joint force headquarters at sea. The new landing platform docks on order will be able to land forces quicker and with greater air support.

The return to a more maritime strategy is the appropriate response to this situation. It involves a return to a more traditional British defence stance, but this time with far greater emphasis on joint operations. We in the Opposition support those aspects of the strategic defence review which carry that forward.

I shall take a moment to express the enormous admiration in which our Navy are held. They are constantly involved in deployments—in the south Atlantic, the Gulf and all over the world. They consistently acquit themselves with success and distinction. We are lucky to have them. Our duty as politicians is to ensure that they have the men, equipment and training to do what we ask of them.

That leads me to the issue of recruitment and retention. I understand that surface ships are sailing with crews about 5 per cent. short of their full complement on a fairly regular basis. Recruitment and retention are therefore vital. Undermanning leads to more frequent tours of duty, longer periods away from home and excessive workloads and that, in itself, causes people to leave early and makes recruitment difficult. It is a vicious circle which must be broken. In the past three years, far more people have left the Navy than have joined it. That must change. I know that the Government realise the seriousness of the matter and attach importance to solving the problem. We shall support them in their efforts, but we shall watch closely to see whether they achieve their aims.

Where better to begin my consideration of procurement issues than with the new carriers? These were and are the centrepiece of the strategic defence review. They were the most heavily leaked or trailed part of it. That document was especially heavily leaked and trailed by the Secretary of State's special adviser, who was comprehensively briefing the press on every aspect long before the House was told and the carriers were in the shop window. The carriers were what justified the cuts in money, men and equipment. In the case of the Navy, it was those new carriers that were to make up for the cuts in the number of submarines and surface ships. The Navy was paying today for promises of a great future in 15 years' time.

I expressed my doubt at the time that this Government would ever build the carriers and I still have doubts. The Treasury, whose bootprints are all over the review, will be back for more. As the Chancellor's public spending plans come under increasing pressure as the economy slows, so he will be back for more cuts in the defence budget.

Even I could not have expected that the Government were actively investigating an alternative option. On 7 September, just a few weeks after publication of the SDR, the Government advertised in the "Ministry of Defence Contracts Bulletin" for a study designed to extend the life of the existing carriers. It stated of the existing carriers:

"conversion would be expected to extend the operational life of the Vessels for a period of 10 years from around 2012 to 2022."

That is wholly incompatible with launching two new carriers in 2012. The Government's bad faith has been there for all to see.

To be fair to the Secretary of State, I expect that that was imposed on him by the Treasury against his wishes. However, his explanations in the SDR debate were so pathetic that he could not have thought up the idea for himself. He did a manful job, pretending that standard practice was being followed and attempting to rubbish what was abundantly obvious to all—that the Government had been caught out in an act of breathtaking duplicity. How can it be standard practice to announce a firm procurement decision and then subsequently to announce a study for an alternative which would completely destroy the case for the original decision? It was a fatuous explanation and the Secretary of State knew it. It must have done immense damage to morale in the Royal Navy and dealt a terminal blow to the Secretary of State's credibility.

The Secretary of State must have come to the same conclusion because, in his first great climbdown of the year, he has abandoned part of those plans. In a further announcement in the same "Ministry of Defence Contracts Bulletin" of 4 November he sneaked out his climbdown in small print:

"The Ministry of Defence now believes it can meet the study need without involving the shipbuilding/ship repair industry and the previous advertisement is thus withdrawn."

What a humiliation. What incompetence. What a climbdown. I can promise the Secretary of State that any further duplicity will be met by the same relentless exposure and questioning from the Opposition. It is unlikely that the climbdown would have taken place if we had not pursued the issue to the embarrassment of Ministers. I look forward to many more climbdowns, starting I hope on Monday with a change of heart about the Secretary of State's damaging plans for the Territorial Army.

Unfortunately, this climbdown cannot be seen to be the end of the matter because it appears that the studies are now to go ahead internally. How can these studies possibly be compatible with firm plans to build the carriers? The Secretary of State cannot bluster his way out of this one. If those studies show that the lives of our existing carriers can be extended within acceptable operational and financial parameters, what will happen? Logic dictates—from experience I know that the Treasury is logical—that the new carriers can be postponed for at least 10 years. That must be the case. I cannot believe that that option was not studied as part of the SDR and rejected. It is the sort of option that must be considered early on, not after an alternative major procurement decision has been taken. I do not think that Ministers even now are being straight with the House.

I have two simple questions which I hope that the Under-Secretary can answer in his reply. If they are not answered today, we shall continue to pursue them. First, is an internal study under way within the Ministry of Defence into the feasibility of converting the existing carriers to operate the joint strike fighter and extend their lives for 10 years until 2022? Secondly, if such a study concludes that this can be done, what will the Secretary of State do? If he intends to go ahead with the new carriers whatever the study says, why bother with the study? Is not the plain fact of the matter that if the study concludes that this option is feasible, he will have to take it and abandon the new carriers for at least 10 years?

[Mr. Maples]

The uncertainty is a serious matter. It is breeding morale problems in the Navy and it is entirely the fault of the Secretary of State, who refuses to stand up to a ridiculous request from the Treasury that appears to have been thrown in after the SDR was published.

Mr. Doug Henderson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the steps that the Government are taking to ensure that the taxpayer gets value for money, given operational needs—something that the study must also consider—were also taken by the previous Conservative Government? He talks about the Treasury being logical. He will know from his days at the Treasury that there was a 10 per cent. cut in defence expenditure during his years there.

Mr. Maples: Defence expenditure was cut at a time when the Labour Opposition were calling for far bigger cuts to the European average. The answer to the Minister's first question is no. I have asked Conservative Secretaries of State for Defence; indeed, we heard my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) intervene in the SDR debate to say that we did not do that. It is complete nonsense. If the Government have taken a decision to commission two new carriers what is the point of having a study to determine whether the old ones can be refitted to take the joint strike fighter? Surely one would answer that question before taking the decision to commit to two new carriers.

The question remains unanswered. Until the Government clear the matter up and say that they are not studying that as an option, people like me and many more people outside the House will have great difficulty in believing that the Government are committed to the two new carriers. They are the absolute centrepiece of the SDR and the Navy's part in it.

Let us assume that the Government will build the two new carriers. We currently have three carriers, but with major and minor refits we can guarantee only one on active service at any one time. Ark Royal is about to have a major refit and lies totally unfit for service at Portsmouth. Illustrious is also there in a dry dock undergoing extensive work that will not be completed until April. Only Invincible is available for service. If we have only two carriers, what will happen? There are bound to be periods when neither will be available. There will be major mid-life refits every 10 years or so, which have traditionally taken two or three years. During a major refit of one carrier, if any work needs to be done to the other, both will be out of service. I know that it is expected that the design of the new carriers will make refits and maintenance work less frequently necessary, but can we know that one of the new carriers will always be available? It is a major problem, and I hope that the Minister can deal with it in his reply.

Project Horizon, the common new generation frigate, is due in service in 2004 to replace the type 42 destroyers. That is only six years away. There have been problems with the project, which is already two years behind schedule. The director of the programme described some of problems, saying:

"The indicative design is too big and too expensive and this autumn we will be doing trade-offs to reduce it to something the three nations can afford . . . We have managed to drive down the complement of the UK version to under 200 naval personnel and we would like to drive down the size from about 6,800 tonnes to about 5,000 tonnes."

It is a late stage to examine such basic issues.

I understand that there are also problems with the missile, combat management, communications and electronic warfare systems. That is a comprehensive list of problems. Is the Minister still confident that the common new generation frigate will enter service on schedule? In view of the problems, is the MOD actively considering alternatives, such as the possibility of more type 23s or the building in Britain of destroyers of the United States Arleigh Burke class? What missile system might be incorporated if the principal anti-aircraft missile system under consideration now is not available on schedule?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I would not have intervened but the hon. Gentleman generously advised us that he cannot stay for the reply. What condition does he think the programme was in when his party left it to us?

Mr. Maples: I have sought to make some party political points, but I deliberately changed my tone when I raised this question. I am not seeking to make such a point. I do not know exactly what state it was left in, but the Minister and his colleagues have been responsible for this country's defence since 1 May last year. They have presumably been addressing the problem. I simply want to know what conclusions they have reached and whether they have considered alternatives in the event that the problems prove insurmountable, or insurmountable within the time frame. The type 42s are old, carry an old missile system and are widely thought not to provide adequate air defence. That gap in the Navy's defences must be filled quickly.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that it is not a question of buying a system off the shelf with the principal anti-air-missile system and the associated radar systems? Those systems have to be developed. It would be a retrograde step to decide now to buy abroad and deny the British defence industry the opportunity to develop areas where it has a two-year head start, provided it gets the support of the Government to introduce it into service.

Mr. Maples: I am not seeking to reopen the decision. Some of the complications arose because this is a three-nation project, and the nations have slightly different requirements. I fear that the project may not be deliverable on time and to its intended capability. What do Ministers think the situation is and what will they do if my fear proves true? Can the Minister confirm that the Tomahawk missile fits to submarines are on schedule and that the two landing platform dock replacements are on target to be delivered as originally envisaged and on time?

Will the Minister give an update on the millennium bug, which is bound to affect many Navy systems? It is highly unlikely that they can all be reprogrammed in advance. What precautionary measures will be taken and what is his current estimate of the likely problem?

Dr. Tonge: I understand that the United States has already tested all its defence equipment through to the

millennium to find what happens; joyfully nothing has happened. Should we not conduct a similar exercise, because there is concern among the general population about defence equipment and the millennium bug?

Mr. Maples: I understand that the tests conducted by the United States armed forces have thrown up considerable problems. I assume that part of the programme for dealing with the millennium bug is to conduct some such trials and tests. That is why I asked the question.

I wish to turn to another piece of gross Government incompetence, although this time it is not the fault of Defence Ministers. The fault lies firmly at the doors of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Foreign Secretary. Chile was set to buy two of our surplus frigates next year. It has been a valued customer of our defence industry for some years. In a parliamentary answer to me last week, the Secretary of State for Defence said:

"I, my Ministerial colleagues, the Chiefs of Staff and my senior officials have met Chilean Defence Ministers and Commanders in Chief on 21 occasions in the UK, Chile and elsewhere since 1 May 1997."

That is a serious relationship, not a casual acquaintance. That is a meeting every few weeks.

All the time Senator Pinochet has been in this country, a Chilean procurement mission has been in Britain, too. Overstretch in the Army was not sufficiently bad to prevent the MOD from assigning a regular officer to accompany the mission around the United Kingdom. I understand that it was very successful and was about to conclude extensive agreements to purchase defence equipment when Senator Pinochet was arrested. Potential orders included combat vehicles, tank sights and engineering equipment. They have all been cancelled as a result of the arrest. Will the Minister confirm that more than £200 million of defence sales have been lost? What will he say to those whose jobs are as a result at stake? Has the obvious enjoyment of the student revolutionaries reacting to the news of the arrest been worth those jobs? It is a fiasco that shows how casual the Government are with our nation's true interests when the opportunity for some self-satisfying gesture manifests itself.

That is neither the end nor the worst of the story. In a further parliamentary answer about the frigates, the Secretary of State said:

"Representative of the Chilean Navy were scheduled to meet my officials for exploratory discussions relating to their frigate replacement programme during a planned visit to the UK at the beginning of November. This will now not take place as originally planned."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1998; Vol. 318, c. *441*.]

Those weasel words disguise the fact that we have lost those frigate sales. Not only has the £20 million of refit work that would have been conducted in British shipyards been lost: the MOD has lost £60 million of capital receipts for the sale of the two frigates that would have been available to it next year. What part of our armed forces will have to pay for that shortfall? Will the Secretary of State impress on the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs that when they give vent to the prejudices of their student days in exaggerated language, they affect the real interests of this country in a damaging way?

Let us consider another example of the Government playing party politics with the defence budget: the proposed refit of HMS Spartan, another issue that we have raised several times without receiving a satisfactory answer. The Chancellor's footprints are all over this one as well. There are five Swiftsure class submarines. Two have completed refits and one is due to be completed in 2000. Each refit has cost about £200 million and the boats will serve on average a further eight years before being decommissioned. HMS Splendid was due for refit at Devonport in 2003, but it has been cancelled and the boat will be decommissioned instead. That leaves HMS Spartan due for refit at Rosyth next year.

Even though Spartan will still be decommissioned in 2006, only four years after the refit, it is to go ahead. In all innocence, I ask whether the Government would be spending £150 million or £200 million on the refit for only four years extra if the work was being done at Devonport. Rosyth is of course close to the Chancellor's heart because it is close to his constituency. In case Ministers think that this is only party political prejudice, I should add that the Select Committee on Defence shares my concern. At paragraph 229 of its report, it says:

"We remain unconvinced that a refit for HMS Spartan, . . . represents good value for money for the taxpayer."

I hope that Ministers will reconsider their decision. It looks like a thoroughly bad decision and one that, if they persist with it, will be investigated by the National Audit Office.

What of the question of European defence policy and the nation's alliances? I can think of no more important issue, but here again we find the Government—this time in the person of the Prime Minister—playing politics. In his never-ending quest for a good headline and the short-term friendship of others, there is apparently no national asset too valuable to be put into play. For the sake of a better atmosphere for a weekend in Austria, the Prime Minister was prepared to undermine and throw into doubt our fundamental security alliances and our commitment to NATO. Not only that: he was prepared to reverse his own policy—one about which he had boasted when he came back from Amsterdam.

During the strategic defence review debate, while Ministers were speaking in the House, the Prime Minister was briefing journalists to the effect that he favoured a European defence capability based on the European Union. That was a 180-degree shift from what he said at Amsterdam, when he boasted that he had struck out the development of a European defence identity. In fact, he described the Franco-German plan as "an ill-judged transplant". These exact issues were raised by me and others in the SDR debate, and we were told that nothing had changed. The Secretary of State said:

"We have a comprehensive view of the role of the European Union and the Western European Union, and the European security and defence identity of NATO. . . . The challenge for the Western European Union is to take on the tasks that it has been given by the Amsterdam treaty and effectively to use its new powers. The challenge for the European Union is relevantly to apply the common foreign and security policy to events in Europe."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 974.]

There was no mention of a defence identity for the EU, but in his interview in *The Times*, the Prime Minister made it plain that he was ready to drop Britain's long-standing objections to the EU's having a defence capability.

I do not believe that the Secretary of State would deliberately mislead the House on this matter. I can only conclude that he did not know and he had not been

[Mr. Maples]

consulted. Let us make no mistake. Such a move would be a fundamental change to a policy of long standing and one that the Prime Minister himself vigorously defended at Amsterdam and afterwards. I believe that it would be a damaging change which would wreck the WEU, undermine NATO and endanger the United States commitment to Europe if the EU developed, as it probably would, into a caucus within the NATO alliance.

Such an identity would exclude several important NATO nations such as Norway and Turkey, which are members of the WEU but not of the EU. It would include several neutral states that are not members of NATO. We have an incredibly successful alliance and joint military planning machine in NATO. It has a European arm in the WEU which can do things without the United States if the occasion and need arises. The WEU has an agreement with NATO to use its planning capabilities and to use United States heavy lift, intelligence and other assets. All EU countries are in the WEU, which provides the most comprehensive European forum. Not only is there no need to replicate any of that in the EU but any such move would inevitably damage NATO.

I can only hope that the Prime Minister was, in his usual casual manner, flying a kite, and that now that the Austrian weekend is over he has forgotten the whole idea. When I called one of the nation's most distinguished defence correspondents to discuss the matter, he said, "Oh, he doesn't really mean it. He does this sort of thing all the time. He's just trying to improve the reception he will get from Chirac and Kohl." I hope that that is right because, if there is to be a change in this policy of such magnitude, it should be fully worked out by the Government and discussed by the House. Our fundamental alliances are not the playthings of the Prime Minister's public relations programme. They are crucial foundations of our security and it is as clear an example as we could ever wish for of how unfit the Prime Minister is for the great responsibilities that he holds that he cannot tell the difference.

May I finish by asking the Minister to clarify for us some of the immediate issues surrounding the verification monitors in Kosovo? I assume that plans are being developed at NATO for their evacuation by force if it becomes necessary. I shall be grateful if the Government can confirm that that is being done. Do the Government believe that a further United Nations resolution is necessary before such a plan can be implemented?

We support the general thrust of the strategic defence review in relation to the Royal Navy. We believe that the development of more expeditionary force capability is the right way to go and that that will involve a force structure for the Navy different from that needed for the cold war. We are delighted that the Government are pursuing so many of the initiatives that we began, and that they are taking forward the strategy and policies that we started.

Recruitment and retention are probably the most important immediate issues facing the Navy—crucial as they are to overstretch. We shall be watching the Government's performance in this area closely.

We are frankly horrified at the casual toying with NATO's credibility for short-term favours. The Secretary of State should explain to the Prime Minister that it must stop. We are concerned at the cuts in the numbers of surface ships and submarines, and that programmes such as horizon appear to be in difficulty. An early replacement for the type 42 destroyers is vital.

By far the most important aspect of this naval strategy will be the two new carriers. The Government have failed to clear up the confusion surrounding their intentions by continuing to examine the alternative of extending the lives of the existing carriers. I urge Ministers to clear the matter up. Otherwise, they will continue to undermine the Government's commitment to the strategy outlined in the SDR. If they do that, we will not be able to continue to support them.

5.55 pm

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I am grateful to be taking part in this important debate on the Royal Navy. My constituency of Dover, whose famous white cliffs have guarded the English channel during this country's darkest hours, has played an important part in supporting the operations of the Royal Navy. Dover continues to maintain close links with the senior service.

Most of our land-based military sites, such as the Old Park barracks in Dover and the Royal Marines barracks in Deal, were closed down in the last five years of the Conservative Administration. Most of our maritime activity is now centred on roll on/roll off ferries, which make up a significant part of the British merchant fleet. Before I became a Member of Parliament, I was proud to sail with that merchant fleet. I should like to concentrate my remarks on the crucial support role that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the rest of the military fleet provides to the Royal Navy and the other two services.

I am pleased to welcome the proposals in the strategic defence review in respect of the Navy, especially the recognition that in the post-cold-war environment we must be prepared to go to the crisis rather than have the crisis come to us. I also welcome the recognition of the importance of strategic transport that flows from that. Particularly welcome are the two additional aircraft carriers, about which we have heard a great deal during the past 10 or 15 minutes, the additional four ro-ro vessels and the 10 per cent. increase in the Royal Naval Reserve. That new tonnage has been widely welcomed. It will help to fill the gaping holes left in the maritime support capabilities that we inherited from the previous Administration.

In the same way as the Royal Naval Reserve has an important and valued role in supporting the military, the Merchant Navy plays an essential role in supporting the Royal Navy and the other two services in times of conflict. The decline and virtual wipe-out of the merchant fleet over which the Tories presided has left us with insufficient vessels to provide the necessary level of support.

I realise that the fortunes of the red ensign lie mainly with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions rather than the Ministry of Defence. We all look forward to the shipping White Paper—the daughter White Paper—which is about to be published. However, in these days of so-called joined-up politics, and in the spirit of the strategic defence review with its emphasis on joint action between the services and a co-ordinated approach to planning, it would have been encouraging to see some recognition in the SDR of the role of the Merchant Navy in supporting the military. It would have

been helpful to see some indication of Minister's views on the size of the fleet below which effective support could not be provided.

The British merchant fleet has long held a key role in our nation's defences, which is why it is traditionally called the fourth arm of our services. Yesterday, we remembered the dead of two world wars and all the other terrible conflicts of the past 80 years. In world war two, the merchant service fulfilled its defence role to the full and suffered proportionately greater losses than any other service. As well as providing operational support for the Royal Navy and back-up for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in the form of tankers, supply vessels and other strategic vessels, it provides transport for our troops, weapons, munitions and aircraft. However, the dreadful decline suffered by the merchant fleet has put such guaranteed support in jeopardy. As recently as 1988, the Select Committee on Defence stated:

"The availability of merchant shipping for defence purposes is governed by three factors—the number of UK flagged ships, their accessibility when they are needed, and a pool of British seafarers to man them. There are grounds for concern on all counts."

When Mrs. Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, the British merchant fleet was the fourth largest in the world; it now ranks 29th in the league table. In the same period, the number of British seafarers employed in UK ships has fallen from 63,000 to fewer than 17,000, and the fleet is now the smallest it has been this century, standing at fewer than 240 ships. Given that background, it would be unfortunate if all the good work for the Royal Navy proposed in the strategic defence review were to be undermined by our inability to provide safe guaranteed support from merchant shipping.

We all applauded the crucial role played by the Royal Navy in the Falklands war, but speaking after that conflict in 1982—16 years ago—Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse said:

"Without the ships taken up from the trade the operation could not have been undertaken."

Even at that time, there were insufficient British ships, so foreign tonnage, including six oil tankers, had to be chartered from foreign nationals. Since the Falklands war and the admiral's warning, the size of the UK fleet has fallen to less than one third of its strength in 1982. With fewer than 240 ships, we now lack the ability to carry out a repeat of the Falklands task force operation. Unfortunately, the previous Government did not learn the lessons of the Falklands and they ignored the dangers of relying increasingly on foreign-flagged and foreign-crewed ships. Consequently, by the time the Gulf crisis hit us, the Admiralty was forced to charter foreign vessels on a grand scale. Only eight of the 143 ships on charter flew the red ensign and were signed up to the British registry.

Some might say that the Gulf operation proved the soundness of relying on foreign charters, but that is not true; instead, it proved that there were dangers inherent in taking such action. There was the danger of delaying military operations—because of problems with the delivery of troops and equipment, there was concern that some units were not combat ready until well after the deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. There was the danger of being held to ransom by foreign ship owners who wanted to exploit tight markets. We heard reliable reports that the Ministry of Defence had to pay as much as three times the going rate to charter ro-ro vessels.

Mr. Hancock: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to agree that much of the blame for those problems lies fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the previous Government, because of the way in which they somewhat gleefully presided over the decline of the British merchant fleet and did little or nothing to stop that decline or to encourage British-based companies to continue to crew their British-flagged ships with British seamen.

Mr. Prosser: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I remember listening to debates in the House during which, time and again, the Conservatives thrust forward the ideas of non-intervention and free markets. They gave little or no support to the Merchant Navy during their 18 years in government.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is not the hon. Gentleman aware that, at this very moment, P and O Stena is doing precisely that—paying off British staff and putting foreign seamen on its merchant vessels? What are the Government doing to prevent that?

Mr. Prosser: The hon. Gentleman knows that P and O Stena's current actions in Newhaven and elsewhere are the result of an inheritance from the Conservative Government who, for 18 years, abdicated their responsibilities, ignored the British merchant fleet and failed to give any support to training. The good news is that there is to be a White Paper that will help the British merchant fleet, encourage the rebuilding of it and arrest the decline that started under the Conservatives.

The third danger of chartering foreign-crewed and foreign-registered vessels is the risk that foreign crews will refuse to enter war zones to support conflicts to which they are not a party. There were several incidents in which seafarers from non-combatant nations refused to sail their ships to the Gulf.

The problems I have described were acknowledged by the deputy commander of the United States forces, Lieutenant-General Calvin Waller. Even before the end of the conflict, a strenuous debate had started in the United States about the problems resulting from having to charter non-US-flagged ships. Since the war, the Americans have taken action. An example of that is the passage last year of the US Maritime Securities Act, which includes a 10-year, $1 billion programme to ensure the retention under the US flag of 50 "military-useful" merchant vessels, thus helping the US to guarantee its sea-lift capacity. They have also introduced other supportive measures for their fleet. By contrast, in this country there was little debate and little action. Although the provision of two ro-ro vessels and the new proposals for a further four heavy-lift ro-ro vessels are welcome, it is thought that we might need twice that number to meet all our defence requirements.

The National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers, which is the Merchant Navy officers' union—to which I am affiliated—considers that the number of product carriers, tankers, general cargo vessels, ro-ros and large container ships remaining in the

[Mr. Prosser]

UK register are now well below anticipated defence needs. The first Atlantic Conveyer, which was lost in the Falklands war and replaced with Government money, was flagged out before the last election. The loss of that high-capacity, deep-sea container ro-ro vessel represented a significant loss of sea-lift support and it is regrettable that the Conservatives failed to take any action to maintain that strategic vessel within the British registry.

The Government's proposals for the modernised Royal Navy rightly lay much emphasis on people and recruitment, training and skills. The British Merchant Navy in general, and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in particular, will also need support for training and recruitment if those services are to maintain sufficient numbers of skilled officers and ratings to meet the needs of changing technology and to provide effective crews in times of conflict. The Government's improved SMART—support for maritime training—programme for the Merchant Navy is welcome, but it is only a start. We look forward to more assistance with training when the shipping White Paper is published later this year.

The special role of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in supporting the Navy and other services is well known. The RFA now represents the biggest employer of UK seafarers and invests considerable resources in training and staff development. Unfortunately, it is being penalised by its own success, because its well-trained officers and ratings are much sought after by other shipping companies and by shore-based industries. As a result, staff turnover is high and there are problems with recruitment. The Government have excluded the RFA from SMART funding because they say it is part of a public sector organisation, but there are many examples of public status not prohibiting public funding, so I hope that the appropriate Ministers will reconsider that decision.

After two decades of severe decline—the most serious decline of any major maritime nation—Britain faces a crisis in its strategic requirements for merchant ships and seafarers. As Ministers prepare to implement the welcome proposals of the SDR for the Royal Navy, I urge them to take special account of the warnings of almost every Select Committee on Defence for the past 16 years and the submissions from the shipping unions and the Chamber of Shipping, which have consistently pressed home the crucial role that the merchant marine has played in past conflicts, and the imperative to keep it in good shape to meet the challenges of future hostilities—which, sadly, as we meet tonight might not be too far over the horizon.

6.9 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am delighted to be able to take part in this debate because I represent Portsmouth, South, which is the traditional and historic home of the Royal Navy. Twelve members of my family have served in or worked for the Royal Navy since the beginning of the first world war. I grew up within a few yards of the main naval base, and I know from that experience that the Navy played a part in the everyday life of the area. Tales of royal naval ships, past and present, were recounted with love and affection by people in the city.

There were also tales of the Under-Secretary's predecessors; some of those characters were as well known as the ships that served in the Navy. I am delighted that he is wearing his Admiralty board tie. There was a time when his predecessors had a uniform to go with the tie, and it was not long ago that many of them paraded around Portsmouth wearing that uniform.

This is an important debate on the future of the Royal Navy. We have had several opportunities over the past few weeks to discuss elements of defence. The Royal Navy has—and will, I hope, continue to have—a special place in the hearts of the British people. There are a number of reasons for that, not least the historic connections going back to well before Nelson's time.

The Navy continues to be in the news daily. In the past few weeks alone, we have heard of the tremendous efforts of the crews of HMS Sheffield, HMS Ocean and RFA Sir Tristram and the Royal Marines, all of whom have been deployed providing humanitarian aid and rescuing people from life and death situations in central America. In earlier debates, we have talked at great length about the crew of HMS Southampton and its humanitarian work in the Caribbean, and many Members have recounted their experiences in the Falklands, the Gulf and, more recently, the former Yugoslavia. The Royal Navy is recognised across the world.

The Minister for the Armed Forces referred to the special way in which the Royal Navy had responded to the strategic defence review. He spoke of its up-front and positive reaction to a review that could not have been an easy experience, coming as it did on the heels of the savage cuts inflicted on the Navy by previous Conservative Defence Ministers. I remember, as other Members do, the year before the Falklands war, when the then Secretary of State, John Nott, made bitter, swingeing cuts not only to the work force and personnel but to equipment. That seriously undermined our nation's effort in the Falklands, and possibly led to the conflict, because the messages sent out by cutting the Navy certainly opened the door of opportunity for the Argentines.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I, too, have a memory of those days, and far more of a signal was sent to the Galtieri regime by the irresponsible policies of unilateral nuclear disarmament and the parades held in favour of it by members of the party that is now in government, and especially by members of the hon. Gentleman's party at the time. The Argentines were perfectly surprised that Britain went to war in that atmosphere, for which the hon. Gentleman's party bears a great deal of the responsibility.

Mr. Hancock: That is sadly predictable twaddle. The hon. Gentleman misses the point completely. Our ability to service a fleet travelling 8,000 miles away from home was seriously undermined, as was the morale of the services, by the actions of the then Tory Government, who were determined to make substantial cuts to the Royal Navy.

The way in which the Royal Navy is either welcomed or feared around the world is very interesting. When a royal naval ship appears in a port, often it is welcomed by the mayor and local dignitaries. When a royal naval ship appears on an adversary's coastline, it creates fear, because a potent challenger has turned up on the doorstep. We could, of course, question the role of our ships in some instances. Some of us would ask what was the role of HMS Cornwall on the coastline of Sierra Leone early this year. Perhaps we shall receive detailed answers to that question at some point.

What rings out loud and clear about the Royal Navy is its reliability when and where it is needed. This and other Governments have relied heavily on the commitment and determination of the Navy's personnel—men and women—and civilians to work hard and defend this country's interests.

Like other hon. Members, I welcome the Minister's commitment to addressing personnel issues in the Navy. Much more must be done. I also welcome the fourth Trident boat, and the good news that it will be launched this autumn. Once again, the Navy has displayed determination and commitment to enable that project to come to fruition. The future visits of Royal Navy ships to former Soviet bloc countries are to be welcomed. The recent experiences in Poland, in Russia and, as the Minister said, in Syria are good examples of the Royal Navy being the first to break into new territory.

The improvement and replacement of ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the commitment to replace HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid are long overdue and most welcome. We want to ensure that a sister ship for HMS Ocean is also provided during this Parliament, because that would be an essential addition to strategic naval planning.

I welcome the determination to spread equal opportunities throughout the armed forces. I would be happier if the Under-Secretary, when he replies, gave a clearer answer than that given by the Armed Forces Minister when he was asked whether gay people should be allowed to continue to serve or to be recruited into the Royal Navy. He said that he would ensure that those issues were put before the House. That is different from the messages sent out by Labour Members when they were in opposition. Many of us are curious about what issues the Government will put to us. I hope that the matter will be taken up again by other hon. Members who have already raised it.

It would be wrong of me not to use at least some of the time available to me to discuss issues in Portsmouth, which has long suffered the aftermath of Government cuts in defence expenditure. When I was growing up in Portsmouth, the dockyard employed more than 40,000 people. The civilian work force in that naval base is now fewer than 1,000, which is a dramatic decrease. The number of service personnel in the area has also declined. As recently as a fortnight ago, the Armed Forces Minister wrote to tell me of further civilian job cuts in my constituency.

We need to know as soon as possible—more importantly, the work force and their families need to know—the Government's proposals for their future. Will the Government encourage the greater flexible use of the fleet maintenance repair operation resources? What are the long-term prospects for the employees at Fleetlands and other bases in and around Portsmouth?

Decisions need to be made about the future of the naval hospital at Haslar, not only because many people in Gosport and Portsmouth use the hospital, but because that planning is essential to the future growth of hospital provision in the Greater Portsmouth area. The hon. Members for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) and for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and I recently wrote a joint letter to the Minister seeking clarification and speedier decision-making. We need openness and transparency in all those matters.

While we are on the subject of transparency, I hope that the Minister will explain why he cannot reveal to the House and the people of Portsmouth what capital receipts the Ministry of Defence received for the sale of the gun wharf and the HMS Vernon site. I am mystified that information about the sale—which is a one-off—can be withheld. I can surmise only that, as the site was not sold to the highest bidder and the developer stands to make tens—if not hundreds—of millions of pounds from its development, the Government are slightly embarrassed by the price that they secured.

The sale of that land, which was prime real estate in anyone's book, and probably the most marketable and most easily disposable site outside London in the Ministry of Defence portfolio, is now a state secret—so much so that the Minister will not answer parliamentary questions on the subject. Many hon. Members are curious about why it is so important to keep that information secret when we know for a fact that the site was not sold to the highest bidder.

As other hon. Members have said, this is the third defence debate to be held in the past three and a half weeks. I welcome the initiative that was first mentioned by the Minister for the Armed Forces in introducing the second of those debates, when he said that he hoped to change the formula for dealing with defence issues. The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), reiterated that today. Rather than holding single service debates, it might be better to have issue-led debates in the future, on matters such as procurement, personnel and so on.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon also asked that the timing of defence debates be considered more sympathetically. I apologise on behalf of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who is unable to attend today's debate. He is a member of the North Atlantic Assembly, and is currently attending a meeting in Edinburgh. I see that many familiar faces from both sides of the Chamber are also absent because they are committed to attending that important meeting. It is regrettable that so many of the usual participants in, and supporters of, defence debates are absent from the House today.

The Minister has failed to respond to several issues raised in previous debates. Recruitment is one such issue, and the problems in that area were outlined again tonight. The Royal Navy is short of 1,500 people. The strategic defence review says that full manning will be achieved by 2002, but that remains a serious problem. The Government have not provided specific answers as to how people will be recruited, and how the existing well-trained personnel will be retained.

I do not think that the Armed Forces Minister provided a satisfactory answer to the question about pilots. Many pilots in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, and helicopter pilots in the Army, receive extremely attractive packages from private industry every day. What will we do to ensure that they stay in the services? We know why they are leaving, but the Minister must tell us what the Government intend to do to make their situation more palatable.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that the Armed Forces Minister's predecessor, the present Minister of Transport, the right hon. Member for

[Mr. Robert Key]

Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), addressed that issue by giving a commitment that the Government would talk to the airlines to see whether they could agree a package? We would be grateful to hear the outcome of those discussions.

Mr. Hancock: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, as I remember that comment well. Perhaps the Minister will update tonight the progress that has been made in that area. However, as many pilots leave the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force to work abroad, I am not sure whether a discussion with British-based airlines will help. It was also suggested that people could be rounded up at jobcentres and recruited into the Royal Navy—which is only one step away from press-ganging.

A recent answer to my written question revealed that the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm is 12 pilots short. That does not sound like many, but we should remember that only 24 pilots complete their training in a good year. Many pilots are leaving the service: 10 times as many pilots asked to leave this year as in 1993. Some 27 pilots applied to leave the service last year—which is three more than qualify in any one year. How will we fill that gap? There is a job to be done, and we must find a way of turning the tide.

We must also turn the tide of departures from the Marines. Well-trained officers—captains of 28 and 30—are leaving the service, as are well-qualified NCOs. I made that point in the general SDR debate. Those service men face promotion logjams, and must make very difficult choices. The situation is the same for Royal Navy personnel: when they progress above junior rank, they encounter a logjam that is difficult to shift. That is despite the fact that ships are going to sea with 5 per cent. and 7 per cent. crew deficiencies—or "gapping", as the Minister calls it.

It is not enough to say that we understand the problems—that will not boost morale in the Royal Navy. We will boost morale only if we come up with solutions that unlock those opportunities, and show young officers that they will have a future in the Royal Navy or the Royal Marines until they are 42 or 50. Many service men are taking serious decisions to leave literally months after completing very expensive, drawn-out training programmes. Undermanning is a serious problem in the Royal Navy.

If HMS Invincible were at sea today, it would not be right for it to be short of 50 or 60 crew members. Ships such as Invincible are the mainstay of our defence capability. A ship that must offer offensive or defensive support to our service personnel on land cannot go to sea with that sort of deficiency in its crew numbers. We must get to grips with that issue.

People leave the Navy not simply for career reasons. We did not need to invite Colin Powell to this country to tell us about personnel problems in our defence forces. If Channel 4 researchers can find ex-service men who say that they left the armed forces because of racial intolerance, why on earth cannot military intelligence find those people? We need to discuss with them what drove them out.

I do not want to hear Ministers claiming that there is no such thing as racial intolerance in the armed forces, when service personnel at different levels are leaving because of it. Television companies locate those people, interview them and parade them on television, yet the Ministry of Defence is incapable of finding them. For goodness' sake, do not try to tell me that we need Colin Powell to instruct us in dealing with racial intolerance or personnel problems. We ought to be able to address those issues ourselves.

David Allen, then the youngest sailor in the Royal Navy, left the service because of bullying over a long period. They are not my words; any hon. Member can read them in the Library briefing. Perhaps Ministers should meet Mr. Allen and ask him to recount his experiences. They might ask him why he was driven out when he could, and should, have had a long career in the Royal Navy. His is not an isolated case. We need clear proposals for tackling those issues.

I have often said that we need a coherent policy on issues that affect men and women who serve or have served in the Royal Navy, or who have worked for it as civilians. I have mentioned the nuclear test veterans, the Gulf war syndrome people and the asbestos sufferers. In the most recent answers to my questions, I was told that another 106 compensation claims have been made for civilians and service men who were exposed to radiation while serving on or maintaining nuclear submarines.

Those people did not get radiation sickness or radiation-related illnesses by sitting in their front room; they got them while they were serving the country. Why does the Ministry of Defence drag out cases and force those individuals to endure long-winded litigation, causing them much suffering and distress? Suffering from a radiation-related illness is bad enough; can hon. Members imagine what it is like to contemplate two, three or five years of litigation against a Government who must know that there is no defensible position?

Mr. Spellar: Is not the hon. Gentleman aware that we are a member of the nuclear industries compensation scheme precisely to avoid some of the problems that he describes?

Mr. Hancock: I understand that entirely, but I should be grateful if, by the end of the debate, the Minister would explain why 106 compensation cases—some of which have been in existence for a considerable time—are outstanding? I know that he cares passionately about such issues; it is obvious, given his previous existence. He well knows what it is like to be on the other side, fighting for one's rights and for compensation for something that is not one's fault, and encountering barriers erected by big business or Government. We need to ensure that the MOD treats service personnel—male or female—and civilians properly.

We must also tackle overstretch. I vividly remember—as must the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North, who is sitting behind the Minister—the daily articles that appeared in my local paper about the protracted time that crews on Invincible were away from home last year, and the effect on the morale of crew and their families.

I welcome the idea of setting up a welfare association for the families of both the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines. I hope that the decision to base that organisation in Plymouth does not prevent it from having outposts in places such as Portsmouth. The overwhelming majority of service personnel in the United Kingdom—at least those

in married quarters—reside in Greater Portsmouth. I am inclined to think that the decision to locate the organisation in Plymouth should be reconsidered, bearing in mind where most of those families and service personnel who live ashore are based.

I hope that the Minister will give us an idea of what he and the Ministry of Defence will do to ensure that overstretch, undermanning and associated morale problems ease in the next two years. I want to ensure that we sign up to a manageable number of commitments, as we have a reduced number of ships with which to fulfil them. The one thing we know for certain is that we have fewer ships available. We also know that Foreign Office Ministers have given us other initiatives, which must be carried out. I should like assurances that overstretch will not be increased—that undermanning of ships' companies will quickly become a thing of the past.

I shall now discuss the two new carriers. Like other hon. Members, I welcomed the suggestion that the Royal Navy would be a significant gainer—if that is the right word—from the SDR, in that it could put two new big ships in the water, which would give us a significant advantage in any seaborne activity. However, we need to ask what package those ships will need.

I am sure that the Ministry of Defence agonised long and hard over the decision to opt for carriers. Even those who have read scant information about carriers know that they are difficult vehicles to protect. The Americans have an in-built protection system. On a ship of 100,000 tonnes with nearly 100 planes on board, the only role of at least 30 per cent. of those planes is to protect the carrier. However, the capability to protect a carrier of half that size from within or from on board is greatly reduced.

I want to ensure that we put two new aircraft carriers in the water, and that the Royal Navy has both the procurement capability and the ships and crews to protect those carriers properly. We want to ensure that those ships can go in harm's way. Certainly, HMS Ocean was not built to go in harm's way. It is a significant omission from the SDR that we have no answer to the question of how will the Government plan to protect those ships when they are in the water.

Other ships should not be sucked out of their commitments to protect carriers. The West Indies guard ship is a classic example, which may easily go. Arguably, it is no longer needed, but a few months ago I was the second speaker at an Oxford Research Group conference at which the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), told us that he wanted the Royal Navy, and specifically that ship, to be used extensively to support anti-drug missions in the Caribbean and central America. It therefore cannot go, if we believe that the Foreign Office are leading on many defence-related issues. The ability of the Royal Navy to mount humanitarian missions throughout the world must be maintained and sustained; but will that be possible when it must also defend two very big carriers?

It is logical to discuss the option of retaining and converting the three existing carriers. I do not support that idea for a minute, but I believe that at least one carrier should be converted and retained, because it makes no sense for all three to be tied up simultaneously in Portsmouth dockyard—as I saw at first hand this year—with not one ready for sea. If we had needed to deliver, in a short time, a fully crewed ship that was ready to go, we could not have done so. We heard earlier of the problems relating to two of the existing carriers.

We must consider all the options, but surely no one seriously suggests that the Government's commitment to the two carriers is less steadfast than it was when the Secretary of State made the announcement—or rather, when it was leaked. I hope that the Minister knocks any such suggestion firmly on the head tonight. I hope that, loud and clear, he will robustly defend the position. The Royal Navy deserves that much. It deserves to be told the truth, as do hon. Members.

An aircraft carrier of the type that we are considering would give us a considerable edge, especially in some parts of the world where we may have to operate in the next 20-odd years, where no friendly land power will allow aircraft to operate and to defend land-based troops. Naval colleagues with far more experience than I tell me that carriers can always find good weather for flying, and can travel 600 miles a day.

I should like to hear what the Minister has to say about the suggestion that the French made recently. A recent *Jane's Defence Weekly* article went into detail about carrier co-operation. The French wanted two nuclear aircraft carriers. They named the first ship, and then were committed to build it. I believe that, if they had not named the ship Charles de Gaulle, they might have found reasons not to build it. Typically, the French, having named the ship well before its keel was laid down, were locked into a position from which they could not move. Perhaps the House should decide to name our two new carriers, putting the Government on the spot, and making it impossible for them to back-track.

Mr. Spellar: HMS Gordon Brown.

Mr. Hancock: No, I cannot imagine anyone in the Royal Navy or the House, other than the Minister, wanting the ship to be named HMS Gordon Brown. I do not believe that the Minister's suggestion is serious, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North, who first made it, now regrets it.

It is important that we examine the options for defending aircraft carriers. Has the MOD considered the idea of arsenal ships, which the Americans are seriously considering? Those are missile-based, small-crewed and little more than powered barges, which have the capacity to deliver a killer punch for a low cost. We, too, should look into that.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser). How right he was to go into detail about the decline of the British merchant fleet. A country such as ours, which for the best part of 2,000 years has depended on seaborne trade for its existence, has a merchant fleet of just over 200 British-registered ships. What a disgrace it was that, during the recent incidents in the Gulf, we had to hire ships flagged in Luxembourg. What a bizarre situation. We are an island race, and Britain is the home of all that was best in maritime service, yet we must rent boats flagged in Luxembourg. What a source of ridicule for the then Government.

We must find ways to stabilise what is left of our merchant fleet. We must be sure that, when we need ships, they will be available. The hon. Member for Dover was

[Mr. Hancock]

right not to exaggerate the situation, but to pinpoint issues such as where crews would be prepared to go and what is on offer.

The Minister has often spoken of smart procurement. We must make sure that the British defence industries, like British Aerospace and many others, are given the support they need. The success of the survey ship HMS Scott is a classic example where the prime contractor—in this case, British Aerospace—was able to deliver a ship on time, to cost and to the complete satisfaction of the Royal Navy. We do not want smart procurement, by its very nature, to lead us to believe that we must buy abroad.

Mr. Ottaway: I have listened with frustration to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) and to what the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) is saying about the British Merchant Navy. It illustrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the British maritime fleet. There is more tonnage owned and managed in London than anywhere else in the world. It is simply a matter of corporation tax. Take away corporation tax on British shipowners, and we would have the largest fleet in the world.

Mr. Hancock: I wonder why the hon. Gentleman did not do that when he had the chance to do so.

Mr. Ottaway: I was not in the Government.

Mr. Hancock: The Government did not do that, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was not the only Tory who had a mind to save the British merchant fleet.

On smart procurement, will the Minister give us an assurance that we will always try to buy British? We should buy British in most instances, and we should look for partnerships and co-operation. I hope that the Royal Navy will continue to be the platform for showing the world what is best in British industry and defence manufacturing.

I shall comment briefly on the remarks of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon about the future of NATO. No one in the House dissents from the need to strengthen and rekindle our enthusiasm for European co-operation. NATO is as important now as it was 40 years ago for the defence of freedom and peace in Europe and other parts of the world.

The Minister for the Armed Forces of the day signed up to the WEU when he signed the Amsterdam treaty on behalf of Britain. Future co-operation on defence-related matters would take place not through the European Union, but through the WEU. Our support for NATO would be strengthened by bringing NATO and the WEU closer together, not by taking away the responsibilities of the WEU. The WEU has a unique feature that should commend itself to any hon. Member: it has political accountability at its assemblies and committee meetings. Politicians from this House, another place and other parts of Europe who care passionately play an active part in the development and change of the WEU. I hope that the Government will continue to support it.

I hope, too, that the Government will give as much support to the Royal Navy and its future as the Royal Navy has given and is giving to this country. The Royal Navy offers reliability when and where we need it. We have taken advantage of that and made use of it. Successive Governments have stood behind its efforts. Ministers will be assured of support in the House and in the Royal Navy if they prove to be reliable and trusted friends of the Royal Navy. Anything short of that would be a great disservice to the past, and, more important, to the future.

6.44 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): My contribution will be much briefer than the previous one. It is entirely appropriate that I speak in the debate as my constituency, St. Albans, is about as far from the sea as one can get. However, I am told that in Roman times galleys sailed up the River Ver which goes through the centre of my constituency, although now there is hardly enough water for a duck to swim in.

As a youth I was an avid reader of C. S. Forrester, and Horatio Hornblower was my hero. Later, I moved on to Alistair Maclean and "HMS Ulysses", and then to Nicholas Monserrat and "The Cruel Sea", which I still read regularly. That generates a romantic view of the Royal Navy, so when I had the opportunity to join the armed forces parliamentary scheme and to be attached to the Navy, I was well pleased. It was a dream come true for me.

I have not been disappointed in my time with the Royal Navy. I have visited and spent time at all the naval training establishments, and I have been impressed with the dedication and commitment to equipping our young people to take their place in our modern Navy. The enthusiasm for the task was infectious. Much of the work at the training schools is now carried out by civilians, and the change from naval to civilian personnel seems to have been almost seamless. It is still going on, with Flagship being developed to carry forward the process; at the same time the facilities at those establishments are being used to their fullest extent.

I remember with particular pleasure the time that I spent at the officer training college at Dartmouth, where Commodore Roy Clare had a refreshing and innovative approach to the training and development of his young officers. I was told that it is common for officers to come up through the ranks. Indeed, I think that a higher proportion of officers do that in the Navy than in any of the other services. That is to their credit. There was a reasonable number of young female officers at the college.

The training in leadership skills was exemplary. I took part in an exercise that was tailor-made for the humanitarian work carried out by HMS Sheffield in the Caribbean. The exercise involved going across a chasm with a rope and two sticks, then setting up a safe environment for a community that had suffered a catastrophe.

I also spent a day on exercises with HMS Invincible and other vessels out in the channel. It included mine sweeping, gun laying and firing and all the other activities that warships need to carry out in time of conflict. All were practised that day. The highlight of the day was the taking off and landing of aircraft. It was an experience and spectacle that I shall never forget. The skill involved in hovering alongside the carrier and then side-slipping on to the deck was awesome. Five aircraft landed within a few minutes; it was a remarkable day.

Of all the time that I spent with the Royal Navy, the most remarkable was the eight days spent aboard HMS Sheffield out in the West Indies a few weeks ago, with the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch). I was made welcome by the captain, Commander Colin Hamp, and his crew and soon settled into life aboard ship. A full programme of activities was organised, which included time spent with each department. I also spent time with the junior ratings in their mess. That was an education. They were a lively bunch, forthright but totally professional. There were about 25 of them in a mess, with a limited amount of space per person. There was little privacy apart from a curtain around each bunk. Hygiene was critical and a great deal of attention was paid to it by officers and crew. I went on evening rounds one night with the executive officer, who found dirt and dust in places that looked perfectly clean to me.

Sheffield had two basic roles—humanitarian work and anti-drug trafficking work. At Montserrat we landed a working party of four men who were to carry out a specific task with the local community, and I was lucky enough to go along and take part in that work. Despite the devastation of their island, the locals appeared to be in reasonable spirits.

We also visited Puerto Rico, landing at the huge American naval base at Roosevelt Roads. I ate a small bucketful of ice-cream and washed it down with a large jug of weak American beer. The Americans have nothing to teach us on the beer front. While there, I was invited on board USS Elrod—an American frigate. I was made welcome and given a tour of the ship, and I met the captain. The American navy seemed very laid back, not nearly as professional as our ship's company and Navy.

The most exciting part of the trip was the chase of a drug trafficking ship. Sheffield was the command vessel of a small squadron involving ships from four nations and two helicopters. In the end, the "go-fast" that we were chasing turned and headed back to Colombia at high speed—a victory of sorts. I was impressed by the handling of the operation by the captain and his team.

The rules of engagement could do with some revision, allowing the captain to be more proactive in the pursuit and stopping of suspected drug traffickers. The Caribbean islands are administered by different countries, and many are independent. Ships often seek safe haven in the territorial waters of those islands. Our ships cannot follow without obtaining clearance from the relevant country, which can take hours, sometimes days. In the meantime, the drug trafficker has long gone. We are taking part in a world war against drugs and we all have an obligation to work together where we can, particularly at the United Nations. If we do not, the crisis will be worse than anything that we have anticipated.

Service personnel usually receive medals for active service. My souvenir version is a ship's hat. On every ship, I collect a hat. I shall not wear one now because it is too small for my big head.

I have enjoyed tremendously my year with the Navy. I found the service in good heart, totally professional and trained to an exceptionally high standard. On 22 July 1807, William Windham, a former Member of Parliament said:

"Those entrusted with arms should be persons of some substance and stake in the country."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1807; Vol. 9, c. 897.]

Our Navy is full of people of substance and stake in the country. We have a Navy of which to be proud.

6.52 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate and to register my ongoing admiration and support for those who serve our nation in the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines and the Merchant Navy. My colleagues and I are proud of the work that they do and the contribution that they make.

In East Antrim in particular, those resident in the major ferry port town of Larne have, on several occasions, been honoured and privileged by arrangements made by Larne borough council and the Ministry of Defence to host Royal Navy ships' visits. It was a great pleasure to welcome ashore officers and ships' companies, and when the residents also took the opportunity to go aboard. I hope that expenditure cuts will not diminish the opportunity for future ships' visits. Given the good will generated in my constituency, I urge the Government to encourage ships' visits as a means of increasing contact between the civilian population and serving naval personnel—which should also help recruitment.

I take this opportunity to invite the Minister to join me in urging elected councillors in those areas with seafaring traditions to give support and encouragement to organisations such as the sea cadets whose members may ultimately progress to the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines or the Merchant Navy.

Many of my constituents are employed in the ship building and aircraft industries in Belfast. Hon. Members with a keen sense of maritime history will acknowledge the contribution made by the Belfast shipyards to the British economy in peace time, and to national security in times of war.

In Northern Ireland the state of the ship building and, latterly, the aerospace and defence industries, has come to represent a microcosm of the economy as a whole. When those manufacturing industries thrive—when orders are coming in and contracts are being won—that is of overall benefit to the economy, materially and psychologically, such is the pride of place given to those industries in the hearts and minds of the people. The ship building industry, more modest in size now than during its halcyon days, still employs more than 1,000 people. The aerospace and defence industries, as represented by Shorts, employ more than 7,000 people in Northern Ireland and a further 3,000 world wide. They are our largest manufacturing employers.

In that context, I come to the specifics of the debate to demonstrate how those industries in Northern Ireland can continue to provide a service for the Ministry of Defence and, in so doing, enhance the local economy. The Royal Navy's new joint strike fighter aircraft is due to enter service on the first of the Navy's new aircraft carriers in 2012. Given the massive multi-billion pound investment which the United Kingdom is making in those aircraft, it is essential that they be equipped with the best possible missiles to ensure that they can provide future air superiority for our forces in the 21st century.

Ulster Unionists believe that, in meeting that requirement, the package offered by Shorts Missile Systems, in conjunction with Raytheon Systems of the United Kingdom, is second to none. The FMRAAM solution—the name given to the Raytheon-Shorts

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

package—is derived from the highly successful combat-proven advanced medium-range air-to-air missile, with upgraded electronics and a new, longer-range rocket motor.

AMRAAM is already in service with the Royal Navy, equipping the Fleet Air Arm's upgraded Harrier FRS2 aircraft. In addition, AMRAAM is also being integrated into the RAF's current Tornado F3 fighter aircraft, and is already scheduled to arm the Eurofighter 2000 when it enters RAF service in 2004. An AMRAAM-based option offers obvious interchangeability and logistic advantages to the services. Furthermore, the incremental growth path from AMRAAM to FMRAAM provides a low-cost, low-risk solution for the requirement, in keeping with the MOD's new smart procurement initiative.

If selected, more than 80 per cent. of the FMRAAM work share will be undertaken in Europe and, more importantly, 75 per cent. in the United Kingdom. Clearly, the programme is highly important to Shorts Missile Systems and, as I have already suggested, to the local economy itself. Shorts will integrate the missile's key advanced guidance section and electronics unit and perform final assembly and checkout in Belfast. Thereafter, Shorts will also provide logistic support for the system while in service, as well as participating in further upgrades of the missile. That will be significant in fostering high-technology employment in Northern Ireland, and in promoting Shorts Missile Systems as a world-class company with an expanding air-to-air missile business.

The Royal Navy deserves only the very best equipment that can be obtained for our future defence. We in Northern Ireland are confident that the FMRAAM solution will be best for the Royal Navy and for the economic interests of the United Kingdom, and that it will complement the sterling defence provided by Royal Navy nuclear submarines.

6.59 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I am proud to represent the most inland constituency in Great Britain. The Ordnance Survey has calculated that one of the villages in my constituency is furthest from the sea of any in the country, so I might be considered ill qualified to speak in this debate. However, my father spent more than 30 years serving in the Royal Navy, and I lived in the Portsmouth area for a long time. I am therefore familiar with naval life and activity from my childhood and teenage years.

That is partly why, this year, I decided to take part in the armed forces scheme, and volunteered to visit naval establishments and ships. By the time that I have finished, I will have spent 21 or 22 days visiting such establishments. It has been an enlightening and enthralling experience. I have been greeted with courtesy and great openness about the Royal Navy's tasks. I have been able to make comparisons with my childhood experience, and occasionally I have met people who served when my father served and asked them about their reactions to the changes that the Royal Navy has faced in the 20 years since he retired.

I have been immensely impressed by the professionalism of those who serve in our Navy. They perform a wide variety of tasks and work hugely complex equipment, and they carry out their immensely difficult tasks on our behalf with great professionalism and commitment. This debate is an opportunity for us to applaud them.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard), I spent some time on HMS Sheffield and was delighted at the commitment shown by its crew in providing aid following the disaster in central America. The fact that those professional men and women are able to turn themselves to such a tasks at very short notice shows the tremendously valuable contribution that we can make in peacetime emergencies, as well as the versatility of the Navy that we are now developing. It is a valuable contribution to international aid and relief.

I broadly support the content of the strategic defence review. I have one reservation, which is about not the document itself but the precondition placed on the review. That was a straightforward political commitment to maintaining the Trident system, regardless of the strategic analysis of the need to maintain it. Although I did not disagree with its conclusions, I felt that that part of the document was less well developed intellectually than I should have liked. The relationship between what was being attempted by maintaining the Trident system and the rest of the Navy's strategic objectives was not entirely clear. It seemed to be a case of saying, "We are already committed to maintaining Trident. We have it, and it is an important part of the bargaining process of disarmament in which we should play a part—enough said." More could have been said and done to analyse the role of that commitment in the future.

On the positive aspects, there is a critical focus on flexibility and the ability to project forces for any purpose. I am taken back to my childhood in the 1960s and my father's experience in the Navy in welcoming the return of the carrier. I well remember strategic defence reviews in the 1960s, as a result of which carriers disappeared. At that time, such reviews had different objectives and faced a different enemy, so it is not surprising that they reached different conclusions. I look forward to a commitment to implement the carrier-based option.

I recognise the SDR's important commitment to jointery and the recognition that the Royal Navy may be a means of delivering relief operations staffed largely by other parts of the armed services. I know from talking to serving men and women that naval personnel have entered into that commitment enthusiastically and voluntarily. They regard it as a critical part of a modern Navy to work closely, and in an integrated fashion, with other parts of the armed services, and that should be applauded.

My business experience is most relevant to defence procurement. My father thought that defence procurement was ill organised, run by a group of people with no idea of what they were attempting to procure, took far too long and was far too expensive. Those ideas are still expressed frequently by serving members of the armed forces. In that respect, the world has not changed dramatically in the past 20 years. Therefore, I looked carefully at the ideas for smart procurement in the defence review and was encouraged by what I found.

The McKinsey report, on which much of the SDR is based, and the extremely useful background essay showed that a number of key messages about procurement had been absorbed. Incidentally, I applaud the publication of the background essay, which provided useful and

interesting material which allowed one to evaluate the decisions that had been made. The review says that the various elements of procurement should be separated. First, commodity procurement—things which the Navy, like any large organisation, needs—should be done as efficiently, quickly and simply as possible. Secondly, commodities that are broadly like anything else but have a defence bent, but have no risk of innovation going wrong or of one technology not working with another, should have a relatively straightforward procurement process. Thirdly, specific defence-related procurement, which carries significant risk of failure and of the challenges of innovation, should have a more complex and intense procurement process.

That three-tier approach is valuable provided that it is critically and intelligently applied in decision making. What I dread is that the third, top-level category will be used too frequently in the process and that we shall dedicate undue resources to the purchasing of material, which, in some cases, could be acquired through simpler means. That is always a temptation in a service where the relationship with the defence industry is sometimes too close and where awareness of value-for-money concepts disappears as people become obsessed about the latest need for innovation in a particular category, whereas 80 or 90 per cent. compliance with need would be sufficient and could be delivered more quickly.

Also important for procurement are a reduction in project phases—so that the approval stages are reached more rapidly and there are fewer of them—and a closer-working team relationship around the procurement process. All those are entirely laudable and likely to lead to more effective procurement of complex naval equipment.

Plenty of history shows how the process can go wrong. The Merlin helicopter is still awaited with bated breath and, arguably, is strategically inappropriate for many of the Navy's helicopter-borne defence needs. We have waited so long for Merlin's arrival that it no longer has as great a relevance to need as we once thought. Therefore, we have neglected the modernisation of the Lynx system and been led down a path of overloading those machines to a level at which some are of relatively limited effectiveness.

That worrying process is alluded to in the strategic defence review, which also recognises that we shall have to modernise Lynx and cut back orders for Merlin, which is appropriate in the circumstances. Those strike me as correct, although I worry a little whether the modernisation of Lynx will deal with the fact that we may end up with an underpowered and aged airframe carrying immensely complex and heavy additional equipment. That will need further analysis and review: the allusion to the modernisation of Lynx is welcome, but further work needs to be done on whether that will deliver the outcome that we seek.

On the more mundane level, we allow our naval personnel to steer complex and expensive ships, and to make crucial decisions about the life or death of themselves and their compatriots, but we have considerable difficulty allowing them to purchase even the more routine items for the maintenance of operational activity on ship. Naval personnel cannot simply go ashore to buy a black plastic bucket; instead, they must go through the full procurement process, which leads back to the United Kingdom. In some cases, the item will be flown out, at immense cost, to meet requirements.

Most modern companies would issue senior personnel with credit cards and encourage them to use those cards intelligently—subject to the normal processes of discipline when they are not being used intelligently—to purchase the necessary rudimentary equipment to maintain operational activity. I know of ships on which basic equipment is not being fixed and ordinary items are not being replaced simply because of the long supply chain back to the United Kingdom and the complex decision-making process that surrounds it.

I am told that my black plastic bucket comes at about £40 in the defence price list. I should think that any hon. Member who walked into B and Q to buy such a bucket would pay about a fiver, although I have not done so for a while. That shows the immense add-on costs that are borne for the bureaucracy and the time-wasting processes that still seem to be tied up in procurement. We have an opportunity: a lot of useful and high-quality management thought has been put into the high-level procurement process, but the lower-level stuff still labours under a complex and arcane bureaucracy that frustrates many of our personnel.

I also note that the Navy awaits Upkeep, its new computer system for stores. I have run information technology projects, and the project is familiar to me—it is running behind schedule and is having difficulty complying with the specifications. With the move towards consolidation of stores requirements and of sourcing of material, one has to ask whether it makes a great deal of sense to have separate IT systems and projects for each armed service for routine products and commodities. That project, as far as I know, is still going on. There may be strong arguments for why it should, but the logic suggests that it should at least be questioned and placed in the context of a joint response to the same issue.

My last couple of points, I am afraid, again hark back to family loyalties, but ones that I still hold dear. This decision was made by the previous Government, so I direct my criticism across the Floor of the House as much as anywhere else: I have doubts about whether dispensing with the requirement for cheap, quiet diesel submarines is necessarily the right strategy at the moment. Many nations are purchasing such submarines quite freely. They are relatively low technology and extremely efficient, if well armed, in furthering defence requirements.

My instinct is that we have made a difficult choice and lumped for a totally nuclear-powered force under the water, but, if we reconsidered, we might judge that a more flexible response would have included a diesel element to the submarine force. We should review that once again in due course.

In their fisheries protection role, our personnel operate under the management of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. My experience prompted me to ask questions about what task they are performing. The Navy carries out the task, but MAFF essentially instructs. Although our personnel apprehend people who are in breach of fishing regulations, it appears that a prosecution is not pursued in nine out of 10 cases. That will, in the end, have some effect on the morale and views of those who are carrying out the task.

[Mr. Mark Todd]

If our personnel think that they are performing a valuable function in which they arrest people for breaching the regulations and bring them into port, but hear that no prosecution has taken place—and that happens far more often than not—that will bear heavily on the way in which they consider their task. That is worrying. There is an opportunity to review the relationship with MAFF and how it chooses to manage that particular role; whether that is best management of our fishing stock, which is the strategic objective; and whether it is sensible to maintain an expensive commitment to that role if we are not seriously committed to enforcing the rules.

I have been impressed with the service personnel with whom I spent my time. I brought back many happy memories from the times that I spent this year with naval personnel, and I can report that, in my experience, morale is generally high and people are enthusiastic about, and committed to, their role. Responses to the defence review—I was in a naval establishment on the day that it was announced, so I could listen to views straight away—were generally enthusiastic and supportive.

There are concerns, and I have touched on some which have a bearing on morale—for example, whether people think that their tasks are not being developed seriously and thought through properly. Generally, however, morale is high, the commitment is there and personnel deserve our support. I hope that every hon. Member can give them that support.

7.18 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), who gave a thoughtful speech. I did not agree with all his points, but those about procurement—especially lower-level procurement—were well made, and I hope that Ministers will take account of them.

We have heard Back-Bench speeches from the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard)—who, unfortunately, is not in his place—and the hon. Member for South Derbyshire. I represent Mid-Bedfordshire. We would all probably say that we are as far from the sea as it is possible to get, but I am delighted by the way in which the hon. Member for South Derbyshire and the hon. Member for St. Albans were treated when they went on Royal Navy schemes.

I sometimes regret the fact that representatives of *Navy News* do not attend our debates on the Royal Navy. As one who has been an avid reader of that publication since I myself was in the Navy, I think that it would be good for the Navy if it reported what Back Benchers thought. It would be a fillip. Friends of mine who are still in the service sometimes feel that Parliament does not understand or care what they do, and most serving officers and men do not know that we have an annual debate on the subject. I think that it is the job of those on *Navy News*, if they bother to read the report of our debate, to reflect the warm words of Members of Parliament in the editorial columns.

Not since Patrick Duffy, the Labour Minister responsible for the Navy between 1976 and 1979, and Keith Speed, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in a Conservative Government between 1979 and 1981, have we had a defence Minister who has served in the Navy. I suppose that, with so few ex-regulars in Parliament, it is not particularly surprising that not one of today's Ministers has served in the armed forces, but I find it regrettable. I do not blame the Ministers, for it is not their fault. It is a fact of political life nowadays.

The problem is not, of course, insuperable. The Government seem to have a Chancellor of the Exchequer who cannot count, a Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who has never run anything and a Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who does not know his mangels from his wurzels, and it is true that, after a bit of time, someone who is new to a Department may turn out to be a good Minister. Nevertheless, if defence Ministers have not served in the armed forces, service chiefs and civil servants will sometimes get their way when they should not. Such people are not infallible.

The Royal Navy went to the Falklands with no early-warning aircraft, in type 21 frigates with aluminium superstructures. We saw the abolition of a reserve fleet, which I consider to have been a mistake, and changes by the last Government to the Royal Naval Reserve, which I think were profoundly mistaken; and, as the hon. Member for South Derbyshire pointed out, we have seen the Navy gold-plating much of the equipment that it has bought, when almost the same type of equipment has been available on the civilian market.

Service chiefs and civil servants do not always make the right decisions. Sometimes it is better for Ministers who understand the services to introduce a bit of common sense into decisions, because some of those decisions protect people's turf. It must be admitted that, on one or two occasions, the fact that Ministers have not understood the subject has proved quite valuable. It was, after all, a Labour Government who decided to scrap all the carriers. The Admiralty, rather cleverly, did a bit of spin doctoring, called the carriers through-deck cruisers and managed to get small aircraft carriers—and it is on the subject of carriers that I wish to begin my speech.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. Gentleman has already had 10 minutes.

Mr. Sayeed: I have been warming up. I have a long way to go yet.

The strategic defence review presaged the building of carriers weighing between 30,000 and 40,000 tonnes, carrying some 50 aircraft of a variable mix, and moving from an anti-submarine warfare role to a joint operations warfare role. I have no argument with that: it strikes me as absolutely right. Whether two carriers are enough is well worth debating, but I think it more important to consider whether we will get even one.

Paragraph 234 of the Defence Committee's eighth report states:

"These new carriers should"—

"should" is in italics—

"be fully operational not later than 2018."

It now appears to be 2022. The paragraph goes on to state, in bold type, that

"a capability gap will exist until the new carriers are operational. We recommend that the MOD examine how the capabilities and capacities of the existing carriers could be upgraded before the new carriers are delivered and produce costings of the various options."

That is critical. We know that this is an unsafe world; we know that we will need carriers. We have no right to send young men and women to sea without ensuring that their equipment works, and works well.

Paragraph 235 states:

"The First Sea Lord also admitted that where two carriers had been operated 'back to back' in the Adriatic he was worried about 'our operational capability for contingency tasks which arise at short notice.'"

That was the last First Sea Lord, Sir Jock Slater, being extraordinarily polite—as one would expect him to be. What he actually meant was that two carriers were not enough. Two small carriers are certainly not enough. What we know is that one of the Invincible class carriers has been—I think this euphemism was used—"on very long readiness" for a very long time. The two effective carriers that we have are not enough; we need three carriers capable of putting to sea. That makes the decision on how many carriers will be built in the future absolutely critical.

Paragraph 235 of the report continues:

"The implications of the decision to procure two rather than three carriers will be that our capability for contingency tasks may be significantly reduced . . . The ability of the proposed two carrier fleet to be able always to supply both carriers for simultaneous operations has not been adequately demonstrated."

Yet, in paragraph 236, the Committee states:

"We were repeatedly told that the UK's possession of two carriers was central to the SDR's expeditionary strategy, and were assured that the decision to procure such carriers would not be reversed."

I hope that promise is kept.

As I have said, I do not believe that two carriers are enough. We should bear in mind refits, docking and essential defects, self-maintenance periods and time on passage—let alone any active service damage, or the shaft problems that we experienced with an Invincible class carrier. Such problems often mean that, even if there are two carriers, only one is ready to go to sea at any given time.

Even more critical are the promised two carriers. They are not due until so far into the future that no funds have been set aside even for the preparatory work. As the strategic defence review bore not the fingerprints but the hoof marks of the Treasury, I will remain unconvinced that the promise will be kept until the First Lord of the Treasury—the Prime Minister—gives the House a categorical assurance that the money will, come what may, be made available to build the two carriers, and to do so on time. I believe that, if times get hard, we will be lucky if even one of them is built.

We know from the SDR that there was a trade-off between the two carriers and the landing platform docks—if they are ever built. The previous Government kept promising the LPDs but never built them, so I do not blame this Government alone—the Tory Government was also at fault. HMS Fearless had a bows-up attitude, as it could not always empty the water out of the stern. I hope that the LPDs will be built, as they will be essential, and I am pleased that HMS Ocean is so advanced in its trials that it can be used operationally.

We know that the frigate and destroyer fleet will be cut by 10 per cent. I believe that the previous Government cut the number of surface warships, particularly frigates and destroyers, by far too much. Anyone who knows how to protect a carrier, which is such a valuable asset, realises that various kinds of ship have to be stationed around it at different distances. Allowing for refits, docking and essential defects, self-maintenance periods and so on, it will be difficult to protect two carriers that are at sea at the same time but operating in different areas. That will be possible only if nearly all the frigate and destroyer force is used and the distance between the carrier and the shore or conflict area is sufficiently great to be in itself a protection. However, carrier forces have to be fairly close in to be effective, which makes them vulnerable. Protection from other major warships nearby and air attack is critical.

I accept that money is tight. Money is always tight, even when one is not at war. When conflict looms, one realises that one does not have sufficient defence capabilities. There are ways round that. It was a considerable mistake to have scrapped any formal reserve fleet. I am not talking about the old reserve fleet of the 1970s, when ships were mothballed and were out of date when they came to be used. There is a procurement case for building hulls that can use modular-designed defence systems or command-and-control and propulsion equipment. That would enable up-to-date systems that can be slotted into hulls to be maintained on shore. As problems or conflicts arise, the number of hulls available could swiftly be increased dramatically.

The Navy also has to have the personnel. One problem is that people in the service have to spend a long time at sea. Those periods are far shorter than they were when I was at sea, but families are now more demanding; they are less accepting of the constraints of service life.

There is no doubt that having Wrens at sea has put pressure on families, as I warned on 5 February 1990 before the Minister even announced his decision. In some activities on warships, such as manning complex electronic equipment, Wrens do a superb job and are often better than male ratings. However, most of them are not built like Laura Davies the golfer and so—as anyone in the service will confirm—have difficulties in lifting heavy equipment, sea boats and so on around ships.

There are pressures on numbers. The Minister is absolutely right to encourage people from ethnic minorities to join the service. The service gives a superb education, a great self-belief and a good understanding of how to deal with the foibles of others in constricted circumstances. It is a superb way of life. The more British people who understand that the armed services are theirs and want to join them the better, so I applaud the Minister on the work that he is doing. His invitation to Colin Powell to address a conference was an excellent idea and I trust that it will bear fruit. However, it is critical that the selection and promotion of those who are black or brown is carried out on exactly the same basis as it is for white ratings and officers. There must be no favouritism, but there must be no discrimination.

In the debate on the SDR on 20 October, I made some points about the Royal Naval Reserve. I believe that the previous Government made a profound mistake in using the reserve to man the gaps in Her Majesty's warships. Until recently, the Royal Naval Reserve had a mine counter-measures role. As I said in that debate, laying mines is one of the cheapest forms of warfare. It is also one of the most damaging to any maritime nation and I find it extraordinary that the SDR has downgraded

[Mr. Sayeed]

that risk, as nearly every maritime waypoint—certainly every port on which we rely and certainly the Arabian gulf, from where we get our oil—is easily mined.

The Soviet Union sold tens of thousands of cheap ground and buoyed mines to a large number of countries with which we are rarely in agreement. Those mines can be deployed easily and nefariously from ships and aircraft. A merchant ship or a fishing vessel that seems perfectly innocent can put down enough mines to block Felixstowe, London, Southampton, Rotterdam or Hamburg.

Reserves would have needed retraining to engage in mine hunting, but I wish that the previous Government, instead of using them as a stop-gap to fill empty berths, had retrained them and used them in the specialist role that they have carried out with considerable distinction for decades. The Government have the opportunity to reverse a mistake.

The fleet is getting smaller, and it was too small in the first place. We have superbly capable ships but they cannot be in more than one place at a time. If we are to operate two carriers independently of one another, we do not have enough surface ships to protect them. The Navy is undermanned and we have to take action.

The service is a great career for any young man or woman. The Government are right to encourage more people to join the Royal Navy, but they must prove to those in the service that they will at the very least fulfil the promises that they have already made. They have to earn the trust of those whom we, as a country, trust to defend us.

7.41 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): As one of an ever-diminishing number of Members of Parliament to have served full time at sea in the Royal Navy, I am the first to admit that, since I joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve as a boy, there has been massive change both in our country and at sea. There has been a massive change in ship design and in the capability of modern warships.

I served in a previous HMS Birmingham, and if ever I feel a need to be reminded of ships of my vintage and the on-board conditions of those days, I need only go to the pool of London and board HMS Belfast. I look forward to the arrival of HMS Cavalier in Chatham, and her restoration and opening to the public, because I believe that that will create enormous interest for future generations and be a fitting memorial to the 153 destroyers and approximately 30,000 sailors lost at sea in the second world war.

There has been massive change in our society, but certain things do not change: for example, the elements in which the Royal Navy operates, and that most fundamental aspect of life on earth, human nature. I want to speak about those four things—ships, the society in which we live, the elements and human nature—all in the context of the Royal Navy.

I join my hon. Friends in deprecating the decision to reduce still further both our surface and our submarine fleet. We have not had a satisfactory answer on what commitments have been shed to enable that reduction to take place. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) spoke of the sheer impossibility of mounting a proper escort for two aircraft carriers at sea. In war conditions, we would struggle to support only one carrier.

I welcome the Government's commitment to continuing the previous Government's policy of strengthening amphibious forces. Since the end of the second world war, not one of the conflicts in which this nation has been involved was anticipated by any of us: every conflict was unforeseen, and it is a great tribute to the men and women of our armed forces that they were able to acquit themselves with great distinction in those conflicts with weaponry that was designed for another purpose. The Royal Navy's weaponry was designed to counteract the submarine threat from Russia, which did not materialise.

I remind the House that the assets central to the policy of strengthening our amphibious forces were ordered under the previous, Conservative Government: very recently, the helicopter landing ship HMS Ocean came into service, and we look forward to the appearance of the replacement ships for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. The acid test for the new Labour Government's commitment to the Royal Navy is the progress that they make, and are seen to make, in ensuring that the two new aircraft carriers enter service on time in 2012, and are not subject to downsizing in the meantime.

Cost is the big factor: modern warships containing the latest technology are hugely expensive. Ministers' responsibility for maintaining a modern Navy is not helped by the speed of technological advance, which threatens to make even the newest ships rapidly obsolescent.

There is, however, another side to the coin: the cost to industry and to our overall economy of not maintaining a thoroughly modern Navy. Down the years, the Royal Navy has been at the forefront of technological development, with, for example, the first ironclad warship in the world; the application of, successively, the steam engine, the diesel engine, gas turbines and nuclear reactors for propulsion; the use of electricity and electronics for communications and sensors; vertical take-off aircraft; the angled deck; the ski jump; and a host of other uniquely British inventions.

The value and importance of the Royal Navy to British industry and the British economy cannot be overstated. It is, and we hope always will be, the customer of British industry. It keeps many sectors of British industry at the cutting edge of technological development. New orders for the Royal Navy are vital to our manufacturing base, and I trust that Ministers will never lose sight of that fact.

The justifications for maintaining a credible modern fleet are plain to see: peacekeeping operations, as in the Adriatic; policing, as in the Falklands and the Caribbean; protecting offshore gas and oil installations and British fishermen in what are still—but only just—British waters; and, not least, deterring aggression and, in the final resort, defending by force the United Kingdom and Britain's interests overseas.

It is said that the service will or must reflect the society in which we live. That is undoubtedly true, as it can do no other, but—and, for me, this is a very big but—that is not a justification for saying that it must compromise its efficiency and its standards by accommodating all the minority groups and interests of a dysfunctional society.

People who join the Navy do so for a range of different reasons: the call of the sea; to see the world; to belong to a disciplined organisation; to learn a trade; to serve their country; and perhaps to escape their home environment. Let us not ignore the fact that many in that last category may be trying to escape an environment corrupted by, for example, absent parents, child abuse, drugs, homosexuality, law breaking or violence. Those are just some of the aspects of our modern society that cannot be tolerated, and must not be reflected in our ships at sea. I hope that I make myself clear, and I trust that the Minister, who is not paying attention at the moment, will confirm that he agrees with me.

I turn to those aspects that do not change—including, first, the elements. Untold thousands of people around the world today owe their lives to the Royal Navy. Thousands of merchant seamen, fishermen and yachtsmen have been rescued from shipwreck by the Royal Navy. Countless thousands have been the beneficiary of emergency aid distributed throughout the world by the Royal Navy. Now, in Honduras, disaster relief is being delivered by 45 Commando Royal Marines, HMS Ocean and HMS Sheffield and the Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, Sir Tristram and Black Rover. The Royal Navy, working in its element, provides a wonderful service for many people who face hardship today.

The extremes of weather that have recently devastated Honduras are not confined to the land. I remind the Minister that worse things happen at sea. Huge tankers disappear without trace. Strong men are rendered useless by seasickness. Warships are set on fire from stem to stern, as happened in the Falklands conflict. In such eventualities, the sailor has to have one hand for himself and one hand for his ship. In such circumstances, who will have a hand for the weaker sex? That is not the only question, or even the biggest question, affecting the role of women at sea. The real question is one of human nature, and I shall turn to that point shortly.

Asked about women at sea, the commanders of ships—the captains, the commodores, the admirals and all the top brass—say that it is a splendid idea. They describe the women who serve in our ships at sea as worth their weight in gold, and say that the Navy could not do without them. However, if one asks the ratings, or better still, the wives of men serving in mixed-manned ships, one gets a different answer. To incarcerate scores of young people of opposite sex in close quarters for weeks at a time is asking for trouble. And trouble, whatever the politically correct top brass may say, is what they get.

I do not base my opinion on the number of offences against the so-called "no touching" rule, or on the number of service women getting pregnant, but on my experience as a young man at sea, and recollections of the emotions and jealousies that the fair sex stimulates among fit young men in the prime of life. I am talking about human nature, and two aspects in particular.

The first is the recognition that to expect young men and women to suppress their feelings and emotions for each other while aboard ship is a triumph of hope over experience, and the second is that expecting commissioned officers to question the received wisdom is tantamount to asking them to make a choice between a principle—which, after all, has been determined by their political masters—and their careers. We see the reluctance of senior officers to question the policy, just as we see the reluctance of politicians to put principle before their own preferment. All too often, we see that happen in the House, so why should we believe that it does not happen in other professions?

I do not ask the Minister to reply directly to me tonight on those two points, but I ask him to undertake to miss no opportunity to talk to the sailors themselves. While he is doing so—preferably out of the earshot of civil servants and officers in charge—he might like to ask them about the effects of overstretch, which is a serious worry to service men and women. I want the Minister to talk to sailors about the effect of overstretch and undermanning on the morale of the lower decks. As the Minister responsible for the Royal Navy, he has an especial duty of care to investigate those personnel matters thoroughly.

Our Navy never sleeps. Around the clock and around the world, the Royal Navy performs its useful tasks, defending us against aggression, protecting British interests, supporting the peace makers and helping others less fortunate than ourselves. Money spent on the Royal Navy is well spent, and I trust that the House wishes to record its sincere thanks to the men and women of the Royal Navy for a job well done.

7.54 pm

Mr. Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on a fluent speech. I did not agree with all his conclusions, but he delivered it well and made my task that much more difficult. When the strategic defence review came out, the Navy and the Royal Marines gave a sigh of relief, because they fared better than most, and that should be noted in a debate on the Navy.

I wish to make some narrow points about people who do not always get mentioned—the civilian workers who support the fleet in all its various establishments. I know that my colleague, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), agrees with me about their contribution. I served for 39 years as a civilian worker and represented them at national level. I live in Portsmouth, I have salt water running through my veins, and I have qualified in jack speak; and I want to give the House an idea of the feelings caused by knowing and working with people who are in difficulties most of the time.

It has frequently been proposed that the civilian work force should be privatised, market-tested or have more efficiency squeezed out of it. Such proposals, which undermine morale, have come up year in, year out. The only time that anything changed was after Keith Speed's review, and that was cheered by many of the work force, because at last somebody had asked what the services wanted, which worked well with the civilian workers' ideas. Reviews by any other Minister, Tory or Labour, are feared.

I want to talk about the people of Portsmouth dockyard. Although it is in Portsmouth, South, many of my constituents work there, and I work with my colleague, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, to look after the work force. We are both concerned about the move to the privatised company, Fleet Support Ltd. and about the people who have worked in support of the fleet for many years. Many of them worked with redundancy notices in their pockets to get the fleet ready for the Falklands. They feel disposed of when such a privatisation happens. I know that the Minister listens to the representatives of the industrial work force at national level, and that he understands the civilian workers' problems. Whether he can do anything about them is another matter.

[Mr. Syd Rapson]

The civilian workers feel unwanted. People such as myself have urged them to take a more modern view of the future. Even trade union officials have encouraged them to change their ways, and the management of FSL have tried to impose a new scheme of annualised hours. However, the work force rejected it in a ballot by 500 to 40, which shows the strength of their feelings—they do not want to know. They face an uncertain future. Having had the protection of the Ministry of Defence for many years, they are now out in the cold, and they are worried. They have rejected the management moves, even though many of us have tried to encourage acceptance. They are told that they are too expensive, and that costs are too high. I was one of the highest paid craftspeople in the Ministry of Defence before I became a Member of Parliament. During my last year in that work, I grossed £13,000 with overtime and a bonus.

In the naval base, wages are even lower than that, although there are allowances, bonuses and overtime. The pay is very low, but staff are told that they are too expensive, and that costs must be cut. An annualised hours scheme is a means of doing away with overtime, giving workers a basic rate of pay, and improving efficiency. I do not disagree with management achieving more efficiency, but worker morale will go down. People become really sad if even more has to be cut from such low wages. It is very depressing.

My neighbour, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, derided me in a previous debate for saying that there was more fat in the system. As one who worked within the system, I can say that there is some fat. However, the civilian work force will not give total effort to management they do not trust. At least 25 per cent. more efficiency could be gained if the workers felt free to help the boss to be more efficient. I frequently tried to encourage the feeling of partnership for the sake of the business, but the way in which MOD establishments have been privatised means that there is no gain for workers in bringing about such efficiency. There is only the sack, or redundancy.

I urge Ministers who are responsible for support services to the fleet and the Navy to consider workers who have given their all to their country in their own way. Many of them are ex-service men. They must be encouraged to participate, and given some share in the benefits of efficiency. For years, the previous Government told us that our pay would be tied to efficiency. The new Government are saying the same sort of thing, but I can speak only from experience of what happened under the previous Government.

Our efficiency went up and up year after year, but they told me, a worker, that despite all those efficiency gains, they were sorry that my pay was stuck on a figure that was acceptable to the general public. Pay rises had to be limited to 2.5 per cent., no matter what the efficiency gain. At some point, efficiency gains will have to be tied to increases in pay. Only then will people release themselves to work with the company to make business better. No doubt no one will take any notice of me, and it would be difficult for Ministers to feed what I say into the system. If anyone can do it, I know that the Minister of State can, because of his negotiating abilities.

I agree with the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), who has just left the Chamber, about Navy News. Not enough is done to publicise what hon. Members say about the Navy, or about the services in general. The parliamentary armed forces scheme has much to answer for. Many of us mention that we have taken part and gained from it, but some people might think that it is a bad thing, intended just to keep us quiet.

I hope to fly to Honduras on Sunday with the Royal Marines, along with my hon. Friends the Members for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) and for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), and the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant). I hope that the trip will not be a hair-raising experience for any of us. It might be more so for some than for others, but the hon. Member for Lichfield is a first-class partner in our team. We live in close quarters on ships with the Royal Marines, who make us do what they do. We do not just visit and view; we have to get stuck in and mix with the troops. The hon. Gentleman has been a first-class competitor and supporter. That is the first time I have ever supported a Conservative.

The scheme is excellent. I have completed about 28 days this year, and I hope that other Members who have not done the scheme will volunteer to do so. Julian, you would be ideal in the Royal Marines—are you the hon. Member for somewhere in the New Forest? You would find the Royal Marines ideal.

I shall finish up, because I could go on for ever, and that would be boring. I should emphasise that there are a lot of civilian workers at the new Defence Aviation Repair Agency. I have raised some worries about that agency, fearing that, in a transition to war, when a civilian work force and all facilities must be available for a 100 per cent. effort, the privatising change that has happened will damage the smooth running of the past. As the hon. Member for Ludlow will know, when the whistle sounds and the balloon goes up, Government workers give 100 per cent. to get ships and aircraft ready.

Privatised companies are something else. They have contracts, and their staff may have difficulties. I worked in the Fleetlands division of DARA, and I know that some of its workers go to Germany on contract for £500 a day over the weekends to make up for their low wages. That means that they are not available for overtime. If there were a call suddenly to expand work from day working to overtime working, as happened with the Falklands, the workers will not be available. They will be in Germany, or elsewhere abroad. For many people, there is no loyalty, only money. That could raise problems in the run-up to war.

I want to finish on the Fleet Maintenance Repair Organisation at Portsmouth dockyard. I have received a letter, and no doubt the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South has received a copy of it. Vice-Admiral Blackham, a customer of Fleet Support Ltd., says that there have been problems and delays with a few ships. The problem is not the efficiency of the workers, however, and it cannot be solved by bringing in an axe to sharpen them up. The problem is with management efficiency.

All the failings described are about planning, not having enough people in the right place at the right time and material losses. All that relates to what Peter Mandelson, the director of the Board of Trade, has said—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has several times overlooked the fact that we ought not to address any Member, or comment on any Member, except by use of their constituency names.

Mr. Rapson: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I put my mistakes down to my ignorance. Whoever it was I mentioned previously did say that industry should sharpen up. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool.

Mr. Doug Henderson: Right hon. Friend.

Mr. Rapson: My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who is President of the Board of Trade.

The point is the efficiency of industry, which is important in a naval base.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. Member raises an important point about the future of FSL and its work force. If they cannot get on board ships to carry out work, it is because there is a problem with forward planning and with co-operation between senior staff at the MoD and senior management at FSL. The only people who ever pay the price for incompetence and bungling by management are the work force. It is they who pay the ultimate price of losing their jobs, and I hope that the Minister will take seriously the problems that the workers face at Portsmouth Dockyard. As the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North has said time and time again—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going on too long.

Mr. Rapson: The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South makes his point well. It is the workers who bear the brunt.

I want to get one final niggle out of my system after waiting for many years to come here. There are among the Government workers in the support services mobile and non-mobile people, but there is something strange about it. The industrial work force are not mobile, but the non-industrial staff invariably are mobile. That means one thing. On the one hand, a worker works for the establishment and if there is a problem, he will be made redundant and will be finished; on the other, a mobile person is not made redundant, but is moved to another job. That is distinctly unfair. There should be equality for mobile and non-mobile workers, just as for everyone else. I shall shut up there, although I could go on for ever on a purely personal note.

I congratulate our Government on the strategic defence review as it affects the Navy. As I have said, there has been a sigh of relief in the Navy. The Royal Marines support it. I would not worry too much about Merlin. It is a lovely aircraft. With the aircraft carriers being exposed, do not forget the airborne stand-off radar programme, which is bringing new technology to defend our fleet from a long distance. I have great hope in the future.

8.9 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): There have been several heartfelt speeches in the debate so far. Hon. Members on both sides of the House were impressed by the outstanding contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). He referred to the reluctance of people sometimes to put principle before preferment. Anyone who knows the history of the last Parliament could never make that accusation against him.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) whose sincerity and commitment shone through everything he said. He drew on a wealth of experience. He kindly invited me to participate in the armed forces' parliamentary scheme. I am just coming to the end of my time on the RAF contingent of the scheme—which is perhaps why he did not notice me from sea level when I flew over him in a Tornado a few months ago. I am sure that he and the hon. Members for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) and for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) would be happy to join me in paying tribute, not only to all the officers and men who make our 21 days with the service of our choice in the course of a year so memorable, but to Sir Neil Thorne, a former Member of this House, whose inspiration it was to set up the scheme. Some eight years ago he recognised the diminishing experience of right hon. and hon. Members of service in the forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) spoke about the Royal Naval Reserve. I was in the RNR for about three years at the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s when I held a lowly position on the minesweeper HMS Glasserton. My hon. Friend's point about the mistake of winding up specific units manned by the RNR and placing reservists to fill gaps in existing units is the one that Conservatives are making now about what is being done to the Territorial Army. The mistake made by the previous Government should not be made by the present Government in relation to the TA.

In the strategic defence review and, inevitably, in debates about the services one finds a great deal said and written about equipment, but rather less about strategy. I shall refer to four or five paragraphs of the review because it is worth putting extracts on the record so that people who listen to the speeches—I know that the numbers may not be large, but they are significant—without necessarily having ploughed through the documents can understand the points that concern us.

My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence referred to the concern of Conservative Members about the sudden shift—which we hope is not a real one, but is a temporary flight of fancy by the Prime Minister—away from dependence on NATO and towards a position where our defence policy could be interfered with by conflicting structures from the European Union—not even the Western European Union, but the EU itself.

It is worth reminding the House of what the SDR says in paragraph 18:

> "We are a major European state and a leading member of the European Union. Our economic and political future is as part of Europe. Our security is indivisible from that of our European partners and Allies. We therefore have a fundamental interest in the security and stability of the continent as a whole and in the effectiveness of NATO as a collective political and military instrument to underpin these interests. This in turn depends on the transatlantic relationship and the continued engagement in Europe of the United States."

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

To mess around with new defence and security organisations which have amongst their members neutral countries, and do not have among their members the United States of America, is folly in the highest degree.

Chapter 3 is headed "Defence missions and tasks" and sets out eight tasks. The only time that the word "strategic" occurs among the tasks for defence is in the eighth of the eight tasks. At the bottom of the order of priority, one tends to think, it lists "Strategic Attack on NATO". Paragraph 45 states:

"For the foreseeable future, we envisage that the largest operation we might have to undertake would be involvement in a major regional conflict, whether as part of NATO or a wider international coalition. We need, however, to retain a basis on which we could reconstitute larger capabilities should a strategic threat to NATO ever begin to re-emerge."

Therein lies the recognition that one day we might find ourselves facing a strategic threat. Any restructuring of any of the armed forces—especially the Royal Navy, where there is such a long lead time between the laying down of naval units and their coming into service—must try to bear that possible strategic threat in mind. It is always the case that at any particular time in a nation's history the threat of a conflict breaking out is relatively small. As hon. Members have already remarked, however, when such a conflict breaks out the likelihood that it will not have been predicted is relatively high.

Paragraph 56 refers to the possibility of a strategic attack on NATO. It states:

"No threat on this scale is in prospect. It would, however, be unwise to conclude that one could never reappear, but the conventional forces needed to threaten such an attack would take many years to create. This Mission therefore provides for longer term insurance through a credible nuclear deterrent and the retention of the essential military capabilities on which we could rebuild larger forces over a long period, if circumstances were radically to worsen."

That leads us to the key role of the Royal Navy and the strategic deterrent itself—Trident. It is music to my ears to hear the chorus of approval from all parties in support of Trident and the strategic nuclear deterrent. It was not always thus, but I am glad that it is now.

I make one little appeal in connection with Trident to the Minister in my last reference to the contents of the SDR. Paragraph 67 states:

"We will have only one submarine on patrol at a time, carrying a reduced load of 48 warheads. This compares with the previous government's announced ceiling of 96."

With respect, that is not to compare like with like.

In July I tabled a series of written questions asking about the number of warheads which had been typically deployed on the Trident system since it came into service in mid-1994 under the Conservative Government. The Government were forthcoming and explained that the figure of 48 that is now being deployed is the exact number of warheads on the Trident submarines and that the typical number of warheads deployed on Trident submarines from the moment of their inception in service was 60. Sometimes it was slightly fewer, sometimes it may have been a little more, but it was never more than 65. We are talking about a reduction of about 20 per cent. in the number of warheads deployed on Trident. As the Government have been honest and open enough to say what the figures are and what they were, they should stop comparing the current actual figure with the ceiling under the previous Government and compare it with the actual figure under the previous Government.

We have heard that there has been a shift from concentration on blue water or open ocean operations to power projection. That means that the Navy goes looking for trouble, sorts it out and operates near the littoral of a country where trouble had arisen. I am concerned about the danger of losing techniques that we must at all costs preserve, in the event of the re-emergence of the unlikely but possible long-term strategic threat that the review recognises. Those capabilities must not be abandoned.

Although I am not on the Royal Navy part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I had a unique experience on 14 May when I went to sea with the third of our Trident submarines, HMS Vigilant. We were operating in the Scottish exercise area shortly before she went into permanent service. It was a remarkable experience and particularly poignant for me because of my involvement in the 1980s in the campaign to bring Trident to fruition.

When we hear about £40 plastic buckets and other expenses that could be trimmed, it strikes us as a little inappropriate that the Navy feels that it can no longer afford to spend money on presenting plaques with crests of warships to visiting naval figures or host naval ports, as has traditionally been done. I am sure that the House will approve of the fact that I can vouch personally for the presentation of a plaque from the House of Commons to the officers and crew of HMS Vigilant, which is even now out on patrol protecting these shores. It is fascinating to consider that its submerged displacement is 16,000 tonnes, rather more than that of any of the cruisers that took part in the famous battle of the River Plate, and heavier even than the Graf Spee, the pocket battleship sunk in that conflict.

We know the balance sheet for the Navy in the SDR. We know about the cut from 35 to 32 frigates and destroyers, and the loss of two attack submarines—a prospect which was widely trailed and was criticised in a letter in *The Times* from Sir Patrick Duffy, a former Labour Navy Minister. We know that the number of mine counter-measures vessels will go from 19 to 22, and not the planned 25.

During his evidence to the Defence Select Committee on 20 July, the then First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Jock Slater, was asked what he disliked about the review. He replied:

"if I lose platforms, whether they are destroyers and frigates or nuclear submarines or helicopters, then I am less than happy. I have to look at it, along with the other chiefs, in defence in the round. If one looks at the package and providing that package is delivered, then I was content to accept reductions in certain areas."

That was, of course, code for the two great aircraft carriers that are somewhere over the horizon. That point was made explicit by his successor as First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, on 27 October, when he told some of us in the all-party defence study group that the best news in the review was the "unequivocal commitment" to two large carriers.

It was said earlier that what goes around, comes around. I too can remember when the late Christopher Mayhew, a man to whom the country owes a great debt for the many battles that he fought in both war and peace to defend this country, resigned as Labour's Navy Minister because of the decision to scrap aircraft carriers when we

were considering our commitments east of Suez. It is strange to think that the wheel has gone full circle with the likelihood of two large carriers being built.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) mentioned how cunningly the Navy chiefs managed to keep the concept of the aircraft carrier alive by creating the through-deck cruiser, which miraculously metamorphosed into an aircraft carrier after a few years in service. Perhaps if the Labour party had decided to scrap our ballistic missile submarines, the Admiralty would have built them anyway and classified them as mobile nuclear power stations. We cannot always rely on such ingenuity to keep the potential and capabilities of the Royal Navy alive when politicians are pulling the rug from underneath the feet of the Admiralty. The Royal Navy is willing to live with the package if the whole package comes to fruition. It will be a long time before we know whether the new carriers will materialise. We must hope that the Government mean to do what they say in respect of them.

I conclude on a more personal note. I was thinking of the tribute that we paid yesterday to those who died in the first and second world wars and in other wars this century. I want to pay tribute to someone whom I regard as representative of the generation that did so much to ensure our freedoms, a constituent of mine, David Balme. As a Sub-Lieutenant aged 20 on HMS Bulldog, when it had trapped the German U-boat U110—which could have blown up or sunk at any second—he led a boarding party onto the submarine and seized from it the Enigma codes, precipitating one of the turning points in the intelligence battle of the Atlantic. While yesterday we were remembering those who did not survive the tremendous battles, it is appropriate to pay tribute, in the context of a Royal Navy debate, to people like David Balme, and the young men who fought with him and survived, who by heroic measures—he was awarded the distinguished service cross—helped keep the sea lanes open and win the battle of the Atlantic, and helped us to survive as a free and democratic country.

8.27 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): This is also a poignant moment for me. I served in the Royal Marines and this is the first Royal Navy debate in which I have spoken. I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson), who said that he was going to Nicaragua and Honduras to join the Royal Marines on humanitarian operations. They will make him most welcome. It is marvellous that so many hon. Members take part in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which gives them the opportunity to gauge our armed forces and understand how excellent they are. We are fortunate in that regard.

Our country has for centuries relied on the Royal Navy as the cornerstone of its defence. Our maritime power, and its latent or actual projection, has served us well, not only in defending our country but in protecting our overseas interests and the interests of our allies.

The success of our armed forces has always been founded on the high quality of the individuals who serve in them, their foresight and their ability to evolve and change. We have reverted recently to an emphasis on joint expeditionary operations. The strategic defence review rightly, in my opinion and that of many hon. Members, identifies joint expeditionary operations capability as being at the core of our defence policy. The SDR recommends at least one and, if need be, two joint rapid reaction forces to provide expeditionary capability.

In his opening speech, the Minister pointed out that we already had in our amphibious fleet and in 3 Commando Brigade an experienced and excellent joint expeditionary force. Of course, he is right. Expeditionary and amphibious warfare demands highly trained and highly committed sailors, Royal Marines, soldiers and airmen who are both versatile and flexible. Not only must they be capable of serving in all theatres of operations around the world but they must be able to serve in a variety of operations from humanitarian through low-level and regional operations to major conflicts.

Ministers and Members of the House should never underestimate that most difficult of skills at the heart of expeditionary operations, in which the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines lead the world. That skill is the headquarters command and control co-ordination and logistic capability. Joint expeditionary operations require immense experience, expertise and skill to co-ordinate the embarkation of troops, ship them to their destination and land them with their weapons, supporting arms and supplies. These are truly joint or combined operations, in which our armed forces excel. For such operations to be feasible, we must have the escort ships and amphibious ships to conduct them.

I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene in his opening speech. I made it clear to him that I welcomed the fact that Fearless and Intrepid were to be replaced by two new assault ships, as we used to call them. They are now called landing platform docks or LPDs. The House will be aware that the very minimum that we require is two ships. After all, they are command and communications ships with heavy landing craft and heavy lift capability. They are not helicopter landing ships like HMS Ocean. They do not have a large flightdeck that can be used to deploy troops in any strength. I need hardly explain that, without a helicopter capability, our expeditionary policy is meaningless. Helicopters and helicopter capability have been at the core of all military operations that we have conducted since 1945. They are indispensable.

I pointed out to the Minister in an intervention that our one helicopter landing ship, Ocean, is now, during its trials, rightly being used for humanitarian operations in Nicaragua and Honduras. I should also point out to the Minister that, with refits and other essential repairs, Ocean will be deployable for only about six months in each year. What are we going to do while we have no helicopter landing ship at sea? The Minister replied to my intervention that the Government proposed to commission two new aircraft carriers. That was a wholly inadequate response. There is no certainty that those ships will be built and, in any event, they are fixed-wing carriers, not helicopter assault ships.

There is a large measure of cross-party agreement that expeditionary capability should be at the core of our defence strategy. We need at least one further helicopter landing ship to fulfil that role.

8.33 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): This has been, as ever, a good debate. I agree with those who say that it should be more widely read—perhaps not in total, but certainly in abridged form—by a wider audience in the Royal Navy and among naval families.

I begin with some comments on the speech by the Minister for the Armed Forces. I am bound to say that the old story that the Government will not take any lessons from us about cuts in defence is wearing a bit thin. The trouble is that we did the dirty work after the cold war, and a painful business it was, but we resisted the taunts for more and more cuts from the Labour party. The cuts that were made are no excuse for cutting now what we are told is a sustainable budget, at a time of no loss of commitments. Indeed, new commitments are arising all the time.

However, I agree with the Minister about the significance of the shipbuilding industry in this country—especially when it comes to HMS Vengeance, which I was privileged to visit up at Barrow. What a very remarkable boat that is and what a very remarkable work force have built her. It is a matter of great pride for them and for our nation that we can build such a fine submarine.

If anyone wants to understand what projection of power means, I suggest arranging to go on a sea day with the Royal Navy, as I did. I am grateful to the captain of HMS Invincible for the invitation and for a memorable day. To be within a few feet of Harriers taking off is possibly one of the most exciting experiences anyone can have. To be out there in the English channel with destroyers, frigates, minesweepers, survey ships, Harriers, Chinooks, Nimrods and other aircraft is a most remarkable experience. I shall never forget the clearly terrified reaction of the recreational sailors on their way across the channel as they saw this armada approaching. Nor will I forget the strangled cries for assistance and directions from the captain of a large container ship, who suddenly realised that he needed about 20 miles to turn around. Where was he to go? It was a remarkable experience and we are proud of the Navy.

We also have two amphibious assault ships in build at Barrow. I have seen them. Very remarkable construction technology is being used there. They of course are in addition to HMS Ocean. I was delighted that the Minister told us about plans for an association for Royal Navy and Royal Marine families. That is a great step forward which must be warmly welcomed by us all. I hope that it will sit comfortably alongside Airwaves, the association of RAF wives once it has its new constitution, and the Army Families Federation.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) talked about the problem of pilots. I have noted his parliamentary questions with great interest. I must also point out that there is a great problem in the Royal Air Force with senior NCOs. Indeed, at one RAF station in eastern England I understand that five senior NCOs a week are leaving that one base. But I digress from the Royal Navy to the RAF.

I must come back to another point that people seem not to have grasped. If the tonnage of an aircraft carrier is doubled, the dimensions are not doubled. Just because we are doubling from 20,000 to 40,000 tonnes, we are not doubling the deck length. Far from it. The deck length will increase by a factor of about 1.3. So Invincible, with a 600ft flight deck, will be succeeded, we hope, by a new carrier with a flightdeck of about 800ft.

Hon. Members on both sides have paid tribute to the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which is tremendous. We have all benefited from what those hon. Members have said. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) shared with us his experience as a serving naval officer. He, along with one or two hon. Members who have spoken, has experience that some of us wish we had had the opportunity to pursue. But we have not, and that is our loss.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) highly praised the procurement programme of the previous Government, for which I am grateful to him. He made an important point from his own experience about overstretch. It is very simple: talk to the people involved—the ratings, officers and families. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) made, as ever, an important contribution. He has a large civilian work force in his constituency; he understands it from that point of view. That is how I understand the issues in my own constituency, where there are about 11,500 Ministry of Defence employees: roughly half of them are uniformed and the rest are scientific and industrial civil servants. We should never forget the difficulty they face resulting from contractorisation, which I saw at Boscombe Down and Porton Down almost a decade ago and which continues today.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) shared with us his great expertise in nuclear matters. I am grateful to him for that and for his telling us about the remarkable discovery of the Enigma decoding machinery and about his constituent David Balme. Everyone has contributed enormously fruitfully to the debate.

This is the first Navy debate for probably more than 100 years in which we have been unable to praise a royal yacht. I lament the passing of the royal yacht Britannia, which was as fine and beautiful a ship when she was decommissioned as she was the day she was launched. I regret that the Government have abandoned the previous Government's commitment to find, somehow or other, a worthy successor. Perhaps that is a dream that, one day, might come true.

Rightly, speaker after speaker mentioned the people who make up the Royal Navy—they are, without doubt, the Royal Navy's greatest resource. We all understand that the Royal Navy is a prisoner of demography in matters of recruitment: there is a fairly static pool of young people, which is unlikely to enlarge until after 2010, at which time things might start to improve. However, there are now 30 per cent. fewer 17 and 18-year-olds in the country than there were only 16 years ago. There has also been a substantial change in educational aspirations: in the early 1980s, one in eight young people stayed on for some sort of higher education, but after 18 years of Conservative Government, that ratio has improved to one in three, which has its downside in terms of recruitment to the armed forces.

The Royal Navy has said that a major influence on recruitment is the attitude of parents. For better or worse, the Royal Navy is not seen by some parents as an equal opportunity employer. I congratulate the Royal Navy on the positive way in which the directorate of naval

recruiting is tackling that perception through advertisements, its Spotlight campaign and the appearance of the Royal Navy students presentation teams at schools and colleges.

Undoubtedly, the appointment of the ethnic minorities liaison officer has also helped in many areas of the country. I pay tribute to the sea cadets—especially the Salisbury contingent, whose members, even though they are a long way from the sea, make a remarkable contribution—they are an important source of recruitment for the Royal Navy. Incidentally, I am aware that there is a real problem of people signing up for the Royal Navy and simply failing to turn up on the day—but no doubt that problem will be addressed.

One of the key proposals by senior officers is to reduce the amount of time sailors spend at sea. Four years ago, the Royal Navy announced that it would reduce days at sea, and the aim of the policy was to guarantee that people would not normally spend more than six days at sea at a time. Of course, on operational deployments, some personnel spend eight or nine months away from home, which can have a damaging effect if they are prevented from taking shore-side courses to develop their careers. The strategic defence review carried a strong personnel message for the Royal Navy, but there is little prospect of any change in tasking. Fewer ships but the same number of tasks put even greater strains on personnel. There appears to be a gap between the aspirations of senior officers and the actuality of life at sea. There are not only fewer ships, but fewer shore jobs. I spoke to one young officer who told me that, in one and half years, he has been ashore for only four weeks.

The question of women at sea has been raised. I think that most Royal Navy personnel know that the decision cannot now be reversed, however much many of my hon. Friends might regret that. A young officer told me that he reckoned that, in 10 years' time, the Navy would not remember not having women at sea. The problem, he said, looking straight at me, lay largely with older people. It was well understood where the boundaries of discipline lay, he said, and it was accepted that there should not be liaisons between officers and ratings, for good disciplinary reasons. However, he also said that the Royal Navy should not be expected to reflect society at large—life could be tough at sea. For some people—male and female—it was tough that earrings are banned.

The young officer went on to say that drugs testing is accepted; however, I received a heartfelt plea that alcohol should not be banned from Her Majesty's ships. The abolition of the rum ration was one thing, but to ban a couple of cans of beer at the end of a shift would not be welcome—nor, I believe, would it be sensible. The United States navy banned alcohol 40 years ago, but I leave it to others to judge whether their social problems have been worse as a result.

The single goal of personnel policy must surely be combat readiness, and to achieve that implies sufficient manning levels. Parents' perceptions and attitudes are clearly important, but so are the perceptions of young people considering the Royal Navy as a career. That is why I welcome and support the key messages of the tri-service equal opportunities conference, which was launched by General Sir Colin Powell—if I may call an honorary knight "sir"—of the United States last Tuesday. Many people are suspicious of moves toward equality of opportunity in the forces. Some people even think that women have no place at all in the forces. I should not dream of arguing that line with my esteemed mother-in-law, who served as a Wren throughout the second world war.

Let me quote one of the key messages that we heard at that conference on Tuesday:

"Our Equal Opportunities are not about political correctness. Rather they are about treating everyone fairly, with dignity and respect. Such treatment, regardless of race, sex and background, enhances team cohesion and underpins the essential characteristics of military ethos. To argue otherwise fails to recognise the inclusive nature of equal opportunities which has a value for everyone; it does not favour minorities at the expense of the majority."

The Royal Navy decided years ago that it needed women in the service, because of their particular qualities and because, with recruitment extremely competitive, it did not seem sensible to exclude half the human race. As Colin Powell so memorably put it on Tuesday,

"You're either part of the solution, or you're part of the problem."

Let us get to grips with the reality of the recruitment problems facing the Royal Navy.

I now turn to a very different practical problem, which is the question of the Royal Navy and Gibraltar. I could spend a lot of time talking about NATO and Gibraltar, but I shall not; that can wait for another occasion. I have known Gibraltar a long time and I recognise the contribution it has made to Britain, to our relations with the rest of the world and to the life of the Navy. I tabled some questions to find out how many submarines of the Royal Navy and the US navy had docked at the Z-berth at Gibraltar. The answer revealed that the number is quite large, which shows that it is an important strategic point both to our Navy and to the American navy.

Even more impressive is the number of Royal Navy ships visiting Gibraltar. In the first ten months of this year, 20 Royal Navy ships and eight Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships paid 48 visits to Gibraltar. That is quite a busy time, although it is not as busy as in the old days of the Royal Navy. The problem of the dockyards and employment there remains a real one for the Government of Gibraltar and for the Ministry of Defence, because it places some burden on their budgets.

There are problems in Gibraltar. The shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), asked the Foreign Secretary about the resources available to the governor of Gibraltar

"to protect the integrity of British territorial waters around Gibraltar against the incursions of Spanish fishing boats and armed militia."

The reply of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), stated:

"We have assured the Governor that HMG will provide whatever support is necessary to protect the integrity of British territorial waters around Gibraltar."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1998; Vol. 318, c. *413*.]

In a letter to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, dated 5 November, the right hon. Lady stated:

"In addition, we have made it clear that Spanish military or law enforcement vessels entering British waters, unless exercising a right of innocent passage in accordance with international law or when invited to co-operate with the Gibraltar authorities, are infringing British sovereignty and will be asked to leave. HMG will continue to safeguard the sovereignty, control and jurisdiction of British waters."

[Mr. Robert Key]

That was good news; however, in a letter dated 9 November, the Chief Minister had to write back to the Minister of State, saying:

"In this respect you will by now be aware of the events of the night of 5th November when three such Spanish vessels, a civil guard boat, a customs boat and a fisheries protection vessel, remained defiantly in British waters just outside Gibraltar harbour for nearly two hours despite repeated requests from the Royal Navy and the Royal Gibraltar Police that they should leave. Indeed one Spanish boat responded by radio that he would continue 'patrolling the area".

I am sure that you will agree that such incidents are serious and that HMG must prevail upon Spain to desist from such infringements of sovereignty. In addition such incidents understandably and justifiably provoke public opinion in Gibraltar. I am certain that no-one will regard that as helpful or constructive. It certainly does nothing to build confidence."

The Government must now begin to respond more positively to that heartfelt plea from the people of Gibraltar, who deserve nothing less.

I turn now to procurement issues. Although Ministers in Whitehall and we in the House are right to debate the billions of pounds that might be spent on aircraft carriers or the progress of the Horizon project—a ship that most people in the Royal Navy will believe in only when they see it steaming over the horizon—we should not forget the frustrations of life at sea. I am impressed to find that the need for strong logistic trails is understood throughout the Royal Navy. Can Ministers ensure, however, that operational requirements do not suffer from absurdly rigid procurement procedures? I pay tribute to the remarks of the hon. Members for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), who also mentioned that point.

I shall give the House two examples. Correct footwear is essential on board ship. Indeed, the entire procurement process is dedicated to making sure that the right footwear is available on a heaving, slippery deck at the right moment. If those boots, costing a few pounds, are not available because of a bureaucratic hitch somewhere along the chain of supply, not only do the millions of pounds spent on aircraft or missiles become irrelevant, but accidents will happen to expensively trained personnel.

There is another point, similar to an earlier point about a black plastic bucket. I was told that during the summer a flight deck officer's headset volume control broke. It was just a simple potentiometer. After six months the headset was still unserviceable. Someone slipped ashore and bought a new control knob for £1.49 from the local shop. The headset was mended and put back in service. The Royal Navy was back in business and sailed to sea. The order was cancelled and a message came back down the supply chain that the officer would have had to wait only another few weeks and he could have had the part for "free" at a cost of only £10 to the taxpayer. That is a tiny example, but it reinforces the point made by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South and others.

Mr. Spellar: We are doing something about that.

Mr. Key: I am delighted to hear that the Under-Secretary is doing something. I understand that, like me, he does all the hard work in the Department. I know that he is a man for detail. I know that the Secretary of State swans around the world telling people what Britain is up to. I know that the Minister for the Armed Forces makes the brave, bold visits to the armed forces around the world and I know that the Under-Secretary is sitting there doing all the paperwork, reading the cases and paying attention to detail, just as I did in other Departments.

Dr. Julian Lewis: He is underpaid.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right.

We all welcome the progress that the Government are making on improving defence medical services and the Defence Secondary Care Agency. The Secretary of State announced measures on 2 November. We shall monitor progress closely, particularly the procurement of a 200-bed primary casualty receiving ship, with a second one available on contract at longer notice if required. Will the Minister clarify now, or later by letter, whether that is in addition to the manning of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Argus as a primary casualty receiving ship? Will we have three such ships in future? Clearly there will be manning problems. We know that the royal naval medical service already has difficulties manning the RFA Argus because of shortages of surgeons, anaesthetists, operating theatre assistants and some specialist nurses.

Echoing other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who regrets his absence tonight, I wonder whether Ministers could give us any clues about their conclusions on the future of the royal naval hospital Haslar at Gosport. I visited that institution with the Select Committee on Defence when it produced its report in the previous Parliament. The hospital is important not only for all three services but for the local community.

We are all proud of the work that the Royal Navy carries out beyond visual range. Much of that is routine patrolling on and under the surface of the sea, and we are proud when the men and women of the Royal Navy and its pilots perform acts of courage, plucking people out of the sea. We are proud of the senior service, when it assists with humanitarian disaster relief, such as in its work in central America at present. We are grateful, too, that the Navy is out on the high seas stopping the flow of illegal drugs.

I was therefore delighted to read on the US Information Agency website in Washington on 14 July that the US and the UK had signed an agreement concerning maritime and aerial operations to suppress illicit trafficking by sea in waters of the Caribbean and Bermuda. The US press release said:

"The reciprocal six-part pact formalizes and regulates an existing 'ship-rider' program of the two countries, under which U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement officials are permitted to ride on British naval vessels in the Caribbean, and their U.K. counterparts ride U.S. ships. The agreement also provides for pursuit of suspect U.S. and U.K. vessels and aircraft into territorial waters, the boarding of suspect vessels in international waters, and the overflight of territorial airspace to track suspect vessels and aircraft, among other provisions."

Why was there no announcement of that in the United Kingdom? There was no statement or even so much as a written answer in the House. How very unlike Labour's Millbank Tower headquarters to miss such a good news story. There was no press notice from the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office;

there was a deafening silence on this side of the Atlantic. I am beginning to think that there might be some virtue in a freedom of information Act.

On 23 July, I was told that the agreement would be published as a Command Paper, accompanied by an explanatory memorandum, and would be subject to the Ponsonby rule. In September, I was told by the FCO that it would available in the week beginning 19 October. On 10 November, I was told that it would be in the Library of the House by the end of the year. Has something gone wrong? What is happening to drug trafficking in the Caribbean? We look forward to an explanation. Better still, we anticipate an end to the Government's secrecy and the publishing of the treaty.

One of the cornerstones of the strategic defence review was the perceived need to move away from Eurocentric, high-intensity, heavy-armoured concepts of war fighting to the lighter, more flexible concept of power projection and rapid reaction, not forgetting, of course, the importance of peace support and humanitarian operations. It is reasonable to say that the success of the SDR and the Government's handling of defence policy will be determined in no small measure by the decisions that they are due to make on a number of sea systems.

The common new generation frigate, or project Horizon, has been an extended lesson in the disadvantages that can attend European collaboration. The House is entitled to ask how it is intended that Horizon will contribute to power projection. It will be capable of fleet area air defence, but how capable will it be in supporting our forces when landing and ashore?

Will Horizon have the capability and flexibility to launch the BGM-109C Tomahawk land attack cruise missile in support of the Army and Royal Marines, bearing it in mind that the recently acquired and welcome capability of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar class SSNs is somewhat limited? Will Horizon be capable of ballistic missile defence against the long-range theatre missile threats that are emerging in the middle east and far east? The protection of British expeditionary forces from such ballistic threats will be an important criterion of success for joint rapid reaction.

There is continuing uncertainty about the future of the Horizon programme and whether it will continue as a collaborative, tri-national programme between the United Kingdom, France and Italy, or whether national solutions will be adopted. Of critical and urgent importance to Matra BAE Dynamics and GEC is the need for an early decision on the principal air-to-air missile system, PAAMS, and the associated Sampson radar, which is manufactured by British Aerospace Defence on the Isle of Wight. The Sampson radar is an extremely exportable piece of equipment.

In order to maintain coherence between the development programmes for the UK PAAMS variant and the development contract to the Franco-Italian variant, for which the contract was let to the French and Italian industries earlier in the year, the way ahead on the industrial structure for Horizon must be urgently clarified within the next few days—and I mean the next few days—thus allowing the new tri-national PAAMS contract to be initialled. If that is not possible, the PAAMS programme should be decoupled from Horizon and allowed to proceed. If the PAAMS programme launch suffers further delays, I fear that the current industrial agreements on PAAMS will start to unravel, which would be to no one's advantage.

There is also the matter of the Government's continuing paralysis on the question of the future of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I think that it is deplorable. It has an effect not just on the DERA work force of 12,500 people but on the whole British defence industry. It is a serious matter and a sign of incompetence. The SDR contained a sentence or two on DERA, and then kicked it into touch. The White Paper on the defence diversification agency contained a sentence or two about DERA, and kicked it into touch as well. Will Ministers now confirm that they have called in yet more consultants to produce a report in six months' time, with a view to announcing a ministerial decision in July 1999?

The Royal Navy needs to maximise the pull-through from applied research at DERA and exploit commercial standards and private sector developments in information technology, systems automation and marine engineering. Much of DERA's work affects the Royal Navy—for example, the development of composite structural radar absorbent material for warships, the integrated mast technology programme and research into blast-resistant structures. The trimaran demonstrator project, which uses the large-scale trials ship, RV Triton, is very important. The combat system 1 technology demonstrator programme uses commercial off-the-shelf IT for the next generation combat systems planned for the future aircraft carriers, for the future surface combatant and for the future attack submarine.

DERA is an extremely important partner in defence sales overseas. There was much crowing in the press this morning over the fact that the Foreign Secretary has denied, at least thrice, the existence of the Labour Government's ethical foreign policy. I shall not join in that crowing. It is worse than incompetent if the Government did not mean what they said about an ethical foreign policy. If the Foreign Secretary knew that everyone except him was off message, why did it take 18 months for him to come clean?

Currently at risk is a substantial investment by DERA and many excellent British companies in the international naval exhibition at Val Paraiso, Chile, at the end of the month. Will HMS Sutherland still attend that exhibition? Will the Minister for the Armed Forces honour his commitment to attend that exhibition in support of British naval excellence? Thousands of British workers in the defence industries need to know the answer.

Whatever our differences with the Government, they pale into insignificance as we unite to thank the men and women of the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and all the civilian support staff in whom we take great pride. We think of them working in central America amongst the utter devastation and the broken spirits in those countries. The professionalism, compassion and pride of the Royal Navy will bring hope and comfort to those people.

We think also of the Royal Navy preparing for the rigours and dangers of a new challenge in the middle east. We recall with gratitude the naval families and friends who keep the home fires burning. Above all, we are grateful for our island's maritime heritage and maritime future—safe in the hands of the Royal Navy.

9.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I think that all hon. Members would agree that this has been a good-natured and interesting debate. Probably the most interesting contribution came from the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who tried to sell the proposition that it was not Mrs. Thatcher's withdrawal of our naval presence from the Falklands—contrary to the policy pursued by the Callaghan Government—but the activities of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament that incited President Galtieri. I suspect that that illusion is shared only by the hon. Gentleman and Bruce Kent. Therefore, I think that it is probably not worthy of the hon. Gentleman's usually serious consideration.

In the course of the debate, I noted with interest the successive contributions by three hon. Members with beards—which is probably an appropriate tribute to the Royal Navy. One of the three, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard), spoke effectively about his involvement with the armed forces parliamentary scheme, as did my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) and the hon. Member for New Forest, East. It always bears repeating that the armed forces parliamentary scheme is of enormous value to hon. Members—particularly in view of the decline in the number of Members of Parliament who have served in the armed forces. However, the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) was incorrect: one member of the defence team, Lord Gilbert, served in the armed forces. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman stands corrected.

Given that general decline, it is very desirable for hon. Members to gain experience of the forces. The scheme is also valuable for the forces, who gain a better understanding of the political process and may express their views to hon. Members and have those views conveyed in debates on the Floor of the House or in Committees. We shall shortly welcome new members to the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I urge hon. Members who have taken part in the scheme to encourage others to participate. They will find it worth while and an aid to better government.

As my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces said, the strategic defence review put people first. That means, among other things, giving our service men and women the equipment that they deserve—which means the best. The Royal Navy will have the best, now and in future.

From fishery protection vessels, through destroyers, frigates and attack submarines, to the Invincible class aircraft carriers and the strategic deterrent, the Royal Navy possesses a formidable spectrum of capabilities. It is no exaggeration to say that it remains at the forefront of the world's navies. That is acknowledged throughout the world.

Maintaining the fleet of today is a massive undertaking, but one that must enjoy a high priority as our service men and women put their lives on the line on the high seas. It is one thing to ensure the fighting effectiveness of today's Navy but another to take the fleet toward the future: toward the next generation of platform and systems, and toward meeting the challenges of the next century. We cannot afford to give the Navy anything but the most modern equipment.

For that reason, we decided in the SDR to replace our current aircraft carriers with two larger, more capable vessels. We are thinking of carriers of about 30,000 to 40,000 tonnes, capable of deploying up to 50 aircraft apiece. Those ships will give us the capacity to project power, to emphasise our resolve in crisis situations and to make a real difference in influencing events ashore.

Regrettably, once again I must lay the canard about what we are doing with carriers. Interestingly—as I think the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) mentioned—a similar process of examining options for a major ship purchase occurred under the previous Administration, in the case of the landing platform dock replacement. Before the procurement of HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark was proceeded with, the do-minimum option of a life extension for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid was examined. That enables us to show that the option chosen was the best value for money for the taxpayer. Unfortunately, having received the answer about our commitment, Opposition Members keep pressing us on that issue, which might cause anxiety among our colleagues in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Key: I am as keen as the hon. Gentleman to lay that canard to rest. The problem is that, as I believe that he will find if he checks, the new inquiries and studies were not carried out after the firm commitment had been given to the House that the project would go ahead. The hon. Gentleman has not answered the question. What will happen if those studies come up with the answer that we do not need the two new aircraft carriers after all? If the hon. Gentleman would give us answers, we might make a lot of progress.

Mr. Spellar: I think that the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge that, with the new generation of carrier-borne aircraft and with the new mission, obviously the project is mission driven and changes will be needed. That is why we went for the two aircraft carriers. We had made that commitment clear. Work in progress is moving along. Unfortunately—possibly to score political points—Opposition Members continue to press us on the subject. I assure them that we are dealing with the matter. They should not be diverted into questioning an evaluation which, in the case of a fairly unique process and a fairly unique product, gives us benchmark figures that enable us to satisfy ourselves on how we are proceeding and the bids that we are receiving and—also very important—to satisfy the Public Accounts Committee, the National Audit Office and other Government Departments.

Mr. Hancock: There is an even greater similarity between what the present Government are going to do with the carriers and what the Conservatives did during the building of HMS Ocean. Once the decision was made to build HMS Ocean, it was re-evaluated and the vessel was built to a lower specification than the military one, presumably on the basis of some exercise that was carried out on the cost of building HMS Ocean to a military specification.

Mr. Spellar: I stand not corrected, but augmented by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Sayeed: My understanding of the landing platform dock decision was that the entry in the contracts journal

took place well before a decision was made to build two new LPDs, whereas, in the case of the carriers, the decision to build two new carriers was announced by the Government, and only after that was the entry made in the contracts journal. Is that correct?

Mr. Spellar: There is a commitment to build two new carriers, and the approximate size is known, but we do not have the final specifications. We need that information to make a proper evaluation, as was rightly said by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire should be assured of our bona fides and of our firm commitment to a key part of the strategic defence review. We recognise the strategic importance of the new role for our forces, in particular the Royal Navy, and the Navy's part in joint operations.

Across the piece, the Royal Navy is being modernised. The Vanguard class Trident missile submarine programme took another major step forward this year with the roll-out and naming of HMS Vengeance, the fourth and final vessel in the class. That was mentioned by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) when he spoke of his visit to Barrow. One of the elements missing from the debate tonight was a speech by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) who now has departmental responsibility, but who has battled strongly over the past few years on behalf of his constituents and those who work in the shipyards at Barrow.

The final three type 23 frigates enter service from the year 2000. We look to the collaborative common new generation frigate programme to provide the successor to the Navy's type 42 air defence destroyers. I shall return to that.

Three Astute class submarines are on contract, and will enter service early next century, with two more planned. All Trafalgar and Astute class boats will now have the Tomahawk land attack capability.

As was mentioned earlier, the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean—the largest vessel in the Royal Navy—formally enters service next year. The new assault ships, Albion and Bulwark, will join her in the amphibious role early next century. The two roll on/roll off ferries currently in service will be joined by a further four—a major enhancement of our strategic lift capacity. The first Merlin anti-submarine helicopters enter service next month.

The SDR reaffirmed the order for two new auxiliary oilers, RFAs Wave Knight and Wave Ruler. I pay tribute to the role of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the merchant marine. I take the points that were raised today, which I know are particularly understood by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Getting the best equipment for the Navy, as I said at the outset, is about putting people first, but of course our service men and women need more than first-rate equipment. They need to know that we have their well-being uppermost in our minds. Their commitment is possible only with our commitment.

That extends to our reserve forces. I thought it a little churlish that, in a debate on the Royal Navy, one or two Opposition Members yet again entered into the argument about the Territorial Army, without at least balancing their comments by pointing out that there is a 10 per cent. increase in the Royal Naval Reserve and in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. We are right to pay tribute to the work that they undertake. We recognise that and see an increasing role for them and also for the Sea Cadets, who were mentioned by the hon. Member for Salisbury and also by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs), who informed me that he had to return to Northern Ireland for a meeting. The hon. Member for East Antrim rightly drew attention to the potential for recruitment.

We do not regard the sea and other cadets simply as a recruitment source. They have a valuable role in their own right and they play a significant role in the community. Equally, we do not ignore the fact that some 25 per cent. of recruits into the forces come from those who have been in the cadets and, furthermore, their retention rate is also much higher than that for other recruits. By no means do we expect them all to go into the forces, nor would we want any such perceived obligation, but we recognise that they are a valuable recruitment source. Therefore, they are not just good value for the country but for the armed forces. That is why we shall be putting additional resources into the cadets in the forthcoming years.

As I have said, the contribution of the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Marine Reserve was clearly confirmed by the outcome of the strategic defence review. The Royal Naval Reserve will benefit not only from an increase in manpower but from a 40 per cent. increase in funding for its training of reservists. The Royal Marine Reserve has been given a 66 per cent. increase in recruit training funding.

The personal dimension extends to the Navy's contribution to defence diplomacy and humanitarian assistance. Making contact with armed forces which, only a decade ago, stood on the other side of the iron curtain draws people together. It builds trust and confidence and maps out a way ahead for co-operation and conciliation in the new century.

The Royal Navy is at the forefront of that process. It leads in a number of initiatives which will build and maintain trust with eastern European navies and which will assist in the development of democratically accountable forces.

There has justifiably been much in the press recently—it has been mentioned in the debate—about the Royal Navy's contribution to humanitarian relief. HMS Sheffield provided assistance to communities on the Honduran islands. Her Lynx helicopter inserted relief teams from the ship's company to distribute food and medical supplies and to provide first aid. Working parties also cleared damaged power cables and restored electrical power and drinking water supplies. It is just what we would expect of the Royal Navy, but it is also a job extremely well done and enormously appreciated in the area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South talked about the role of the Fleet Maintenance Repair Organisation and I think that both also mentioned Fleetlands. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North rightly mentioned the considerable role of civilian employees and contractors who are enormously effective in providing the back-up for our services.

After some initial difficulties, FMRO is starting to work well. There is greater co-operation and interaction between the management and the work force. Fleetlands, which is now part of the Defence Aviation Repair

[Mr. Spellar]

Agency, of whose owners' advisory board I am chairman, has also made some exciting developments which will be of benefit to the four sites that comprise that agency.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South asked about staff recruitment and retention and the problems of overstretch, as did the hon. Member for Salisbury. Most of the personnel released by changes resulting from the strategic defence review will be redeployed across the service, precisely to deal with the problems of the gapping of billets, the pressures which result from that and the danger of a cycle of overstretch. On current trends, we hope to have removed manning shortages by 2002. That will be good for the Navy and for the sailors.

The hon. Members for Salisbury and for Portsmouth, South talked about the problem of pilots, which faces armed forces throughout the world, whether in the United States, Singapore or Finland. In recent discussions, all those countries have drawn attention to that problem. That is partly because of an upsurge in hiring by airlines and partly because pilots feel that they must take that opportunity while it exists, given the cyclical nature of the civil aviation industry. Like many other countries, we are involved in discussions with airlines and are looking at what lessons we can learn from each other and what we can do about retention.

However, the airlines must take some responsibility because they are taking on expensively trained personnel whom they would otherwise have to train. A programme in which pilots can move across to airlines at an appropriate pace would be advantageous to us, to airlines if they would take a slightly longer perspective, and to pilots, who could spend a few more years carrying out the interesting and fulfilling role of a fast jet pilot, knowing that they could then move into the civilian sphere. Thus, we are aware of the problem and are taking measures to resolve it in co-operation with other air forces and navies around the world.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South discussed nuclear workers and test veterans. I dealt with nuclear workers in an intervention. I believe that I have already sent the hon. Gentleman a report on nuclear test veterans, which he can look at again in the Library. The eminently respected Sir Richard Doll of the National Radiological Protection Board undertook not one but two studies on that subject and found no greater incidence of radiation-related cancers among those involved in nuclear tests than among a similar population that was not involved. Had a case been found, of course we would have responded, but the scientific facts do not back that up, whatever the assertions made.

Mr. Hancock: This nation must have a moral obligation to compensate a group of men who were subjected to being very close to nuclear explosions, and whose health has subsequently suffered—indeed, many have died from the illnesses caused. The tragedy for them and their families should be recognised. If it can be proven that their illnesses are the direct result of their closeness to those explosions and the subsequent clean-up operations, we have a moral obligation to compensate them sooner rather than later.

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman is right, but he has defined the problem. He said, "if it can be proven". The best scientific advice from the top epidemiologist in the world, Sir Richard Doll, does not lead to that conclusion. We must take that on board and bluntly accept that a third of this country's population will contract cancer during the normal course of their lives. It is the recorded cause of death for about a quarter of the population, so those who were at nuclear tests and contracted cancer might have done so anyway. Compensation must be based on scientific evidence.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) and the hon. Member for Salisbury raised some worthwhile points on smart procurement and credit cards. We are moving on to Government credit cards and considering taking nearly all the commodity products out of the standard procurement process, as the hon. Member for South Derbyshire described. We fully understand that local purchasing can be based on Government credit cards and on the appropriate checks undertaken through computer systems to prevent most types of fraud. It is not revolutionary; indeed, a number of other armed services around the world have already done that.

We also recognise the considerable savings that can be achieved on individual line items and the much greater speed with which people get the parts. We fully understand that and we are already making some use of that way of operating. We shall be evaluating it and then considering how far it can roll out—it is important, to reform and streamline our procurement processes.

I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire about computer systems and Upkeep. The dilemma that is always faced—not only by us, but by any commercial organisation—is, to what extent should we aim for the ultimate and best system, and to what extent should we make what we have work along the way? Sometimes the best can be the enemy of the good in such exercises, but that point is understood by the new Chief of Defence Logistics, who is bringing together the logistics organisations of all three services.

A first-class officer, General Sir Sam Cowan, has been appointed to that post. The fact that we have made such an appointment, and General Cowan is undertaking such work, shows that we are seized of the problems and of the great advantages—not only in costs, but in enhanced operational effectiveness—that will come through that.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) made a number of points. He asked about the year 2000 problem, as did the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire.

Mr. Sayeed *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman did not, so we shall get back to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon.

If he wishes, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon could have a meeting with my noble Friend Lord Gilbert, who can speak at considerable length and with considerable authority on the subject. He is seized of it, and has made sure that everyone in earshot and in sight is seized of it. My noble Friend is driving the process through in the Department and is evaluating our systems, especially our critical systems. We are making considerable progress, and we must also press the message overseas to ensure that not only ourselves, but many of our allies, are apprised of the subject to a similar extent.

The hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon also raised the question of HMS Spartan, which is to be retained until 2006 and will be the second strategic submarine nuclear to pay off in the gradual reduction from 12 to 10, in line with the reduction under the SDR. I am advised that, for HMS Spartan to remain operationally effective until 2006, it will need essential refuelling and maintenance work. Its refit will therefore be constrained to the minimum necessary work for it to carry out its operational role and will cost less than originally planned.

The hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon asked about the Kosovo evacuation plans. I am advised by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces that we have such plans. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned leaks; as I said yesterday, I should have thought that that was a subject on which a period of silence from the Opposition was in order.

The common new generation frigate, which comprises the Horizon ship and the principal anti-air-missile system and will succeed the type 42s early in the next century, was rightly mentioned by a number of hon. Members. We have recently made significant progress with PAAMS and need to make similar advances on the warship programme in the near future.

It would be wrong to pretend that CNGF has been an easy programme, either under this Administration or under our predecessors. Negotiations with industry and with our collaborative partners have been long and difficult, but it is important that every effort be made to make further progress. The type 42s have given excellent service, but cannot go on for ever. We believe that the Navy has sufficient anti-air warfare capability until CNGF enters service, but cheap and highly effective anti-ship missiles are becoming increasingly available on the world market. We must ensure that we continue to have the means to counter them.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) raised the question of landing platform docks and where we were going with those.

Mr. Burnett: I talked about LPDs, but my particular problem was that we have one helicopter carrier—

Mr. Spellar *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We cannot have two hon. Members on their feet at the same time. I think that the Minister has given way to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett).

Mr. Burnett: The Minister should pay particular attention to the fact that we have only one helicopter carrier. If any sense is to be made of the expeditionary policy that is at the core of the SDR, we need at least two.

Mr. Spellar: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the SDR agreed the design and build of HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark, together with an integrated communications system. That is very much part of the wider reach of joint operations. The in-service dates for those replacements are March 2002 and March 2003.

I think that that will cover a number of the hon. Gentleman's anxieties with regard to increasing our capability.

Mr. Gill: I am interested by the exchange of views between the Minister and the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett). The Minister seems still to be ignoring the burden of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He is talking about the helicopter ships, not the LPDs. There is a distinction. The hon. Gentleman is asking why we do not have two helicopter ships.

Mr. Spellar: One of the problems is that everyone would always like more—another ship, and another. HMS Ocean is the largest vessel in the Royal Navy, and is currently on its trials. We need to get the balance right within the available resources. We need to look, for example, at the projection of power through the two new aircraft carriers. HMS Ocean represents a significant enhancement of our capability, as, indeed, will the new LPDs. There may be requests for additional enhancement further down the track, but I think that we have a pretty versatile, effective and powerful package.

The hon. Member for Salisbury, in what, by describing it as an extremely constructive speech, I hope that I will not damage him too much, referred to the royal yachts. Labour Members were not sure whether that was a spending commitment, and whether it had been cleared with the shadow Chancellor; but the hon. Gentleman made some very useful comments about Tuesday's conference with General Sir Colin Powell, and about the considerable efforts being made by the Navy, under Commander Keith Manchanda, to spread the message about good naval careers among the ethnic community. That excellent work is beginning to produce a response. There is no doubt that the Navy is playing a leading role in the services in putting the message across.

The hon. Member for Salisbury asked about the hospital receiving ship. I am pleased to tell him that a further enhancement of the capabilities will be a major upgrading of the facilities supplied by RFA Argus, to be made during her refit in 2000, and improvements to the facilities provided by RFAs Fort Victoria and Fort George. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned Gibraltar. We are well aware of the considerable service provided by Gibraltar and its people to our services, not just in the past. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces and I have both been to Gibraltar, he in his former role as a Foreign Office Minister. The main difference between us is that he ran up the rock with the Gibraltar regiment, and I certainly did not.

Mr. Gill: May I say something about Gibraltar?

Mr. Spellar: No. I am aware of the time, and the normal blandishments of the Whips, which no one resists in any sense.

We have been around the circuit again on the question of the Western European Union, NATO and the European Union. We have made it clear a number of times that NATO is the cornerstone of our defence policy, that we do not support and will not have a European standing army, and that that is not a role for the European Commission or the European Parliament. Equally, I think that we all recognise—indeed, the former Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Portillo, recognised—that Europe was not seen to be pulling its weight in the defence community. There was a need to ensure a European strategic and defence identity. The problem with the debate that has taken place in the past few weeks is that we have become totally immersed in institutional

[Mr. Spellar]

names and acronyms instead of saying what we are trying to achieve, which will be important not only in enhancing Europe's role but to its image in the United States.

Hon. Members will be well aware that the question whether Europe is pulling its weight is often asked in the United States, especially in Congress. A diverse and disparate Europe that is thought not to be pulling its weight is grist to the mill for the traditional isolationists, who want to retreat from involvement overseas. If we have as our objective an enhanced role for Europe, and I believe that that would command general support in the House, we can move towards deciding how that can best be achieved institutionally, but we have tended, in the past few weeks, to wrap ourselves in acronyms and in degrees in history.

Dr. Julian Lewis: How will our setting up structures that conflict with existing successful structures, and our incorporation into our security arrangements of neutrals that are not members of NATO, help in creating the perception among Americans that Europe is pulling its weight? That strategy will undermine, not enhance, security.

Mr. Spellar: As I said, NATO is the cornerstone of our defence arrangements. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would argue, in the light of what happened in the Balkans, that Europe has been effective in making its presence felt or in taking appropriate decisions. We must move to a broader consensus on Europe and evolve a policy that will reflect it.

No policy is without difficulty, but we need to work out how to move from the position that we are in, which is broadly agreed to be unsatisfactory. The previous Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Portillo, agreed to the strategy worked out in Berlin and it was subsequently ratified at NATO meetings. The hon. Member for New Forest, East must accept that there is a broad consensus on the nature of the problem, although I agree that there is not yet a consensus on the solution, not only in this country but in Europe as a whole—we must continue to try to find that solution.

The debate has covered a wide range of the Navy's activities since the general election. It has illustrated that the Royal Navy remains a force for good in a troubled world. That is why we all join in paying the warmest possible tribute to the men and women, both service and civilian, who make the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines the world-class fighting forces that they are.

The Government see the brightest possible future for the Royal Navy, which not only continues to be close to the heart of all that is uniquely British, but is modern, adaptable and able to take its place in the fast-changing strategic setting of the 21st century. That is why the SDR puts the Royal Navy at the heart of the Government's strategy of building an effective force that is capable of power projection and of being a force for good in the world.

In the thoughtful parts of his speech, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon reflected on the Navy's historical role. We commemorate this year the bicentenary of Nelson's great victory in the battle of the Nile; in 2001, we will celebrate the battle of Copenhagen and, in 2005, the defining battle of Trafalgar. Of the Royal Navy in those days, Mahan said:

"Those far distant, storm beaten ships, upon which the Grand Army never looked, stood between it and the domination of the world".

Under our plans, the Royal Navy will maintain its position as a significant force in the world and a service of which we and it can be proud.

Mr. Graham Allen (Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

PETITION

Road Safety (Bricket Wood)

9.39 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): I am pleased to present and to give my support to a petition raised by the Bricket Wood residents association and signed by more than 1,400 of my constituents. It declares that the roads leading out of Bricket Wood are extremely dangerous. Driving out of the village at busy times relies on split-second judgment and luck. Slow traffic crossing the slip road leading to and from the M1 southbound is a recipe for disaster, but residents of Bricket Wood have to do that every day, as the alternative exits from the village take them into high-density, fast-flowing traffic.

The petitioner therefore requests:

"That the House of Commons urge the Minister to bear our safety uppermost in mind and ensure that the authorities take prompt and effective action to remedy the dangerous situation outlined above and provide safer exits out of Bricket Wood."

To lie upon the Table.

The Borders

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

9.40 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I want to draw attention to the difficulties in the regional economy of south-east Scotland and north Northumberland. I am pleased to be joined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), whose joint interests in the debate have been notified to the Minister, and who I hope will be able to contribute.

I was pleased to welcome the Minister to Hawick earlier this week. He confirmed important details relating to the implementation of the Hawick internal traffic relief scheme. With his assistance, we look forward to the work starting next autumn: that is a welcome development for Hawick.

Because the area is similar to his own constituency, the Minister will know that the people of the borders are not by nature a demonstrative folk. It is worth noting that, in the very recent past, a petition organised by Tweeddale Press Group attracted more than 11,000 signatures in an extremely short space of time, and that a public rally organised on a stormy Sunday afternoon last month in Galashiels was supported by more than 2,500 people—an event the like of which has not been seen locally for many years.

Tweeddale Press Group's petition, entitled "Keep the Borders Working", asked the Prime Minister to mobilise all the resources of central Government to mitigate the recent catastrophic job losses that have occurred or been announced in the region over recent months.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and I have lodged an application with the Prime Minister to see him in the near future and make representations along the lines contained in the petition. The job losses affect not only the borders. Berwick-upon-Tweed shares a travel-to-work area with eastern Berwickshire, so this matter is not only a Scottish Office responsibility.

Earlier this year we were just beginning to come to terms with what were at that time unprecedented job losses in the traditional manufacturing sector in the borders and north Northumberland, in textiles and, equally importantly, in the primary producing agricultural sector, which has recently suffered larger numbers of smaller-scale losses, which are sometimes less dramatically notified, so it is harder to track their exact extent.

Pringle of Scotland, Lyle and Scott and many other small or medium knitwear businesses have reduced their work forces dramatically over a short period. My constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed suffered about 350 job losses apiece just before the summer. We were just beginning to try to come to terms with that when out of the sky fell the dramatic announcement of 1,000 job losses by the Viasystems group in Selkirk and Galashiels. That company is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, although many of those who will lose their jobs come from communities in my constituency.

I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge that the scale of the difficulties is such that they cannot be adequately addressed using the area's own resources. We also need some external assistance.

The Minister will have seen for himself, during his short but productive visit to Hawick, that everything that can be done locally is being done. All the relevant bodies in the local economy in the public sector have been mobilised and they are working closely together. Their co-ordination is excellent and their motivation is obvious, but the budgets within which they are struggling to work were cast at a time when no one could foresee what would happen, although we warned Ministers in the previous Administration that the textile industry was in a fragile state. Notwithstanding that, no one could have predicted 12 months ago that things would be as bad as they are.

The Government should address four aspects of the problem. First, we need them to investigate every nook and cranny of any budget that is available through local authorities or the Scottish Enterprise mechanism to see whether any small underspends, additional resources, capital assets or capital consents can be deployed to help the area cope with the short-term problems that we face.

Secondly, and in particular, we need early confirmation that Scottish Office Ministers will honour their pledge to seek actively to determine whether any underspend has occurred in the present EU objective 5b structural funding programme and to divert any such underspend to areas such as the borders and north Northumberland.

Thirdly, we also need help in applying for eligibility for the new objective 2 category of EU structural funds in the next programme of funding. The safety net that the Government secured in the new programme will assist that process and that is welcome, but we need Scottish Office support for our case to have much chance of accessing any EU funds in future. We have taken fruitful advantage of the £20 million-odd that we have had during the current programme.

Fourthly, the petition from Tweeddale Press Group directly adverted to the need for assisted area status, but we also need help from central Government with our application for future access to regional development assistance. The map is being redrawn currently, in co-operation with the Department of Trade and Industry, but if we do not get help we will face depopulation in the next few years. That will damage the local economy and we will suffer the consequences for many years to come.

I have two concerns specific to my constituency. I am worried about the knitwear industry and the agricultural sector, which is spread widely across the region. Hawick, and towns like it, have several viable knitwear businesses. They operate in niche markets and they manufacture world-quality goods, but they need to be nurtured and helped to develop. They need help with training, equipment and new market opportunities and they need assistance to enable them to compete more effectively in future. The Government can help with such activities.

Border towns such as Hawick need much more public investment in the built environment. The traffic relief scheme that the Minister announced when he was in Hawick will help that and it could be used as a focal point around which other built environment improvements

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

could be structured. Good examples exist of what can be done. If the Minister cares to look at the example of Duns in my constituency, he will see a central town scheme that transformed the centre in a way that gave a boost to the whole local economy. We have been told that we will have a replacement cottage hospital in Hawick, and that is welcome. However, it is a private finance initiative project, so it will take longer than we would have liked. Other welcome initiatives have been taken in the Galalaw factory units to grow new small-scale businesses in the town, but we need more assistance in training and business development in the community.

We also need the Borders college to be expanded. I was disappointed to discover that the rules do not allow mature students over 50 access to student loans. An electrician in my constituency wants to study computer science and has been accepted on a course. Because he is 52, he cannot get a loan, but that is perverse and the Government should reconsider that obstacle to retraining. A change would not cost large sums of money, but it would make a difference to the constituent to whom I spoke on Friday.

The Borders college has been given help recently. My hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale has received some welcome news about expansion in bursary capacity there. He and I are keen that the problems of a split-site rural college of education should be recognised in the funding formula. I need not overstress that argument to the Minister, who knows well enough those difficulties from the problems in his own back yard.

Tourism can develop, there is potential for forestry processing, and the local enterprise company, Scottish Borders Enterprise, is working hard to expand indigenous businesses. The local authority is working hard to develop business, to improve transport links and to gain additional resources for schools. The Secretary of State has been to the Burnfoot primary school in Hawick and has given extra assistance to the community school development there, and that is very welcome.

The borders could also take advantage of social inclusion schemes that are currently in gestation. I plead with the Minister to consider urgently applications that will come from the region. In passing, I should just mention the Dalkeith bypass. When the Minister visited Hawick earlier this week, he heard from the convenor of Borders council that the bypass is important to the borders economy: it is not just an Edinburgh issue.

There is evidence of market failure in the private sector in south-east Scotland. The public sector must pump-prime provision of factories and other premises in areas in which the private sector simply is not prepared to invest. Towns such as Hawick need that. We must provide premises of the right size and quality, in the right places. That would be a sensible investment, which would pay dividends by unlocking private sector investment that would kick up and underpin the local economy.

We can take advantage of one new opportunity—the welcome new development at the Heriot-Watt university campus. That gives us access to higher education, and it could result in spin-offs such as development of a science park at the Riccarton site. I attended Heriot-Watt university myself, and I know what a magnet and what a generator of economic wealth a science park spun around a campus can be. There are opportunities for conference facilities and for information technology spin-offs for the whole region if the park is properly developed. We still require Government help with that investment.

The local authority and the local enterprise company are compiling a medium-term economic strategy. I am confident that that will address the questions, and that it will come up with good recommendations. We need help to bridge gaps in the short term, however, to ensure that the system works.

I have two final points, on agriculture. There is concern that the Irish Government have put money into reducing Ireland's ewe flow. The Republic's national heritage Department is, if rumour is correct, putting funds into agriculture, paying £30 a head to take ewes out of the system. That may be good for the south of Ireland, but the ewes may be dumped on the United Kingdom market at £17 a kilo. That would have a catastrophic effect on an already difficult sheep market throughout Scotland, and particularly in the borders.

Secondly, we need a package of measures to tackle the problems of agriculture by reorganising local businesses. In particular, we need a more effective outgoers scheme to allow tenant farmers on the hills to retire with some dignity.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that we face serious problems. My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and I are determined to keep on raising these matters robustly and positively to make sure that the Government are kept informed of local circumstances as the local crisis unfolds. We want the House to be able to monitor Ministers' responses. If we hear only empty rhetoric, local people will notice it. That would cause damaging depopulation, which would be held against the Government for many years to come.

9.53 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for seeking this debate and giving us and our hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) an opportunity to represent concerns that go right across the borders.

As my hon. Friend made clear when he spoke about the redundancies at Pringle of Scotland which occurred in both his constituency and Berwick-upon-Tweed, redundancies know no boundaries. Although the firm is called Pringle of Scotland and it did not make much publicly of the fact that so much of its knitwear was assembled in England, it was a significant employer in the town. In years gone by it employed hundreds more even than those who lost their job at that final stage. Textile job losses hit us hard, along with the rest of the borders.

Since then there have been other losses as a couple of firms have gone under, one in computer cataloguing and the other a sandwich business. Both provided vital jobs in the area.

At the same time, we have a desperately difficult situation in agriculture. It is not always realised how many agriculture-related businesses there are in the communities of the borders or how much the small

towns depend on agriculture because they service it. They provide it with supplies, machinery and vehicles. They maintain those vehicles and carry out engineering and other services. Not only Berwick and Kelso, but smaller towns like Wooler, Belford, Chirnside and Coldstream are involved in those businesses and they are all feeling the pinch severely. Further job losses are starting to happen in agriculture-related businesses, all of which trade across the border. It is a cross-border problem which demands cross-border solutions.

In this my brief contribution I want to emphasise to a Scottish Office Minister how he might help us and what he could be doing. I remind him that if 100 jobs are created in Berwick, in all probability 20 or 25 of them will be taken by my hon. Friend's Scottish constituents. If 20 jobs are created in the Cornhill area, a number of people from Coldstream will take those jobs. Conversely, the success of businesses on the Scottish side of the border, such as Dexters papermill in Chirnside and others, is crucial to my constituents.

I should first like to see the Minister ensure full co-operation from Scottish agencies with the Berwick area task force. It was set up to co-ordinate all the work of all the Government-related and relevant private bodies that can contribute to economic regeneration in and around Berwick. It started life as Pringles task force in response to the redundancies there, but it has had to change its name because of so many other redundancies elsewhere and the widening problem. We have had some co-operation from the Scottish Borders Council and from the Scottish Development Agency, and we should like that to continue and to be strengthened.

In recognising that jobs in Berwick are relevant to the other side of the border, I hope that the door will not be shut on any suggestion of some financial help in putting together a joint bid for some industrial regeneration project or other. It would be sound investment for the Scottish agencies. The problem is often assembling a bid which puts together enough matching funds to draw out the European funds which are available for many of these projects, such as those for textile areas under the Retex scheme. The other day a Minister assured me that there are £2.5 million in funds directly accessible for various regeneration work in the Berwick area, but that depends on assembling matching funds.

In the context of European funds I echo my hon. Friend's plea in so far as it relates to north Northumberland, too. I hope that he recognises how important it is that north Northumberland continues to have some access to European and United Kingdom regional funds. We have patchy involvement now partly because in times past the Berwick area has not been one of high unemployment. We are suddenly faced with these problems. The southern end of my constituency, which is more related to the Tyneside economy, has had high unemployment for a long time. Unemployment has hit the borders severely in relatively recent times and since most of the old maps of assisted area status and so on were created.

I hope that the Minister recognises the importance of infrastructure spending on jobs in the area. All of this is of cross-border significance. Hon. Members have worked together on the A1 campaign because it is crucial to the communities on both sides of the border that we have a safe and effective A1. We have all been bitterly disappointed—indeed, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has said so—that so many A1 dualling projects have been abandoned on the Scottish side and that progress on the English side is so limited.

There are other transport plans and proposals, for example for a rail freight centre in Berwick and for opening up rail links in the borders. I hope that they will be looked on with favour because they will bring jobs as they are created and will strengthen the infrastructure for the businesses that could prosper in the area.

My last point concerns joined-up Government, in the phrase that Ministers have popularised. When an area has a crisis such as this, every Department should be put on notice that it has special problems so that all decisions are checked for whether they will make the problems worse. It is happening even now. Several Ministers have said how concerned they are by the situation in the borders but harmful decisions are still being taken.

We have a classic coming up on Monday. If the Government announce that we are to lose the Territorial Army centre in Berwick, we will lose some full-time jobs, and the input into the training and development of the relatively young men and women who have the opportunity to serve in the TA. They would have to travel to continue serving. Closure would have an impact on the area.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Mr. Beith: Education expenditure, to give only one more example, is crucial. My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire mentioned further education, of which there is little in the eastern borders. For most people, there is almost nothing within 30 or 40 miles or any sort of travelling distance. Berwick-upon-Tweed has only a tiny annex of Northumberland college with a useful but limited range of facilities. The only other readily accessible facility is the part of the Borders college at Duns. Again, that is only a small part of the college's activities. Without further education facilities in the area, we cannot re-equip our young people to follow different careers. I hope that as part of joined-up Government, Ministers realise that every Department must deliver its policies as they affect areas with special problems. I hope that the three of us will have made the case that the area has special problems.

10.1 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for encouraging me to participate in this debate, and to the Minister for his willingness to hear from the three Members who represent south-east Scotland and Northumberland, which have been badly affected by economic developments over the past 12 or 18 months.

It has been a dreadful year. We face the loss of about 2,000 or 2,500 jobs. There is not a community that has not been affected. My right hon. and hon. Friends have been most eloquent in explaining how the different communities north and south of the border have been affected, and how much they depend on one another. It is only as we approach Christmas that the personal tragedy of lost jobs and lack of income, and the desperation

[Mr. Michael Moore]

of families, will come home to roost, not least in textiles, but also in electronics, with the first major redundancies from Viasystems expected in the next few weeks.

Our part of the country welcomes the fact that Ministers have visited and seen our problems at first hand. It is fair to say that, over the summer, we have had many meetings with Ministers in Glasgow or in the borders, and we are most grateful for that. If the Minister will accept a small reminder, many initiatives have come from the communities of the borders and local agencies. All the people of the borders recognise the need to come up with good, positive ideas. The various rescue plans put to the Scottish Office over the past few months pay tribute to the creativity and far-sightedness of many local people in understanding the nature of the problems that affect our area, and possible solutions to help get us out of the current difficulties.

There is no lack of community spirit. We hear so often about the borders rivalries. This shows the flip side: towns and villages coming together, recognising the common purpose of the borders and the north of England. We know that we need a variety of responses in the short, medium and long term.

For the short term, I have already mentioned that so many families are horribly affected by the sudden loss of jobs and thus of income. We have had some high-profile task forces from the Department of Social Security and the Employment Service in our area in recent weeks. We are anxious to have an assurance from the Minister that those task forces will remain in the borders, properly staffed and resourced, for many weeks and months to come, to ensure that the proper advice and support is available to those families in their hour of need.

In the medium term, to provide some solutions for our part of Scotland and the north of England, we must tackle our disadvantages. Reference has already been made to the need for assisted area status. I commend to the Minister the publication by Scottish Borders council entitled "The Scottish borders case for assisted area status" only recently produced, and now submitted to the Scottish Office.

We have suffered often in the borders from an apparent wealth and an apparent lack of the headline figures such as high unemployment that might make us eligible for support. The thoughtful proposal by the local council in partnership with the enterprise company and others highlights the fact that the problem with unemployment figures is that they do not take any account of the many people who leave the area. Indeed, too many people may be forced to leave our part of the country.

Just a short trip—the Minister may have made it this week—into the top end of Galashiels from Edinburgh reveals that almost every third house is for sale. People do not hang around to be unemployed in the borders. Other factors, such as our very low income per head and our very low numbers of young people, should be taken into account when the assessment for assisted area status is made.

The Minister will be familiar with our view from deputations that my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and I have brought to him about the future of European Union structural funds. When we met recently at Dover house, he encouraged us to go away and pull together the different parties involved in the bid for objective 2 status. I can happily report to the Minister that, only this week, we had a meeting at the Scottish Borders tourist board headquarters in the borders of all the main parties. We shall meet on a monthly basis from now until the announcement is made about the future.

We are committed to ensuring that we produce a co-ordinated response which will demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that the borders deserve to be considered properly within the objective 2 category, and at the very least are eligible for the safety net proposed by the European Commission.

When we get beyond medium-term initiatives, we have to look at the long-term problems. Too often in the past, people in the borders have identified many of our problems, be it poor roads or the lack of a railway, yet previous Administrations have chosen to ignore them, and have never prioritised them. We hope that the Government will not repeat their mistakes.

We welcome the fact that, over the summer and the past few months, a high-level working party sponsored by the Scottish Office and led by a senior Scottish Office civil servant has been looking at the various problems in the borders. We hope that the Minister will be able to tell us, if not this evening then soon, when we might expect an interim announcement from that working party as it draws together its first conclusions and reports to the Secretary of State.

We hope that it will not finish quickly, meaning that the problems of the borders are quietly shelved, and Government initiatives move on to other areas. We hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that there will be a continuing focus for that group, and that there will be evidence of the joined-up thinking to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred in Government Departments for some time to come.

I want to pay particular attention to the case of Viasystems, the electronics company that recently announced it would close with the loss of 1,000 jobs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire pointed out, although those jobs are primarily situated in my constituency, in Selkirk and Galashiels, the effect of their loss will be felt across the borders. There is a real sense of shock that something as horrific as that is to hit the local area. In many cases, people have put 30 hard years of their life into the company, which was highly profitable and had a committed and productive work force, yet their commitment, productivity and hard work have been betrayed by the management in St. Louis.

During the summer, my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and I visited St. Louis, and put the case to the management for continuing with the Viasystems plants in the borders, but our appeal fell on deaf ears. It was not that we made an emotional case; our case was based on hard financial realities. In the first six months of this year, Viasystems' plants in the borders made a profit, by the company's own definition, of £2 million. The company makes an estimate of earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation and amortisation; as an accountant, I could get very excited about all that, but suffice it to say that the company chooses in all its corporate releases to concentrate on that operational measure.

As I said, in the first six months of this year, the profit made by the company's own measure was £2 million, so it is a disgrace that the company has argued publicly that it was losing money in the borders. The only way in which the company could begin to portray the borders facilities as losing money is by allocating some interest charges from an Italian subsidiary, Zincocelere, that has absolutely nothing to do with the borders; by attributing to the operational performance of the facility £200,000 associated with early redundancies this year; and—something which sticks in the throats of many in the borders—by allocating nearly £100,000 of fees paid to the financiers Hicks, Muse, Tate and Furst, who put up the money that backs the Viasystems shareholders.

My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and I have often called for a public inquiry into the Government assistance given to the corporation. When we saw the Secretary of State a few days ago, he promised once again to look at the matter. We hope that the documents surrounding the Viasystems case will be put into the public domain, and that all the efforts of local trade unionists and the people working in the factory to transfer work from the borders to other plants will be exposed. Only then will we have a true picture of what Viasystems has been up to.

Collectively, we have painted a bleak picture of what is happening in the borders, and I believe that it is a fair portrayal. However, we would all agree that we must not talk down our part of Scotland and northern England. There is still a lot in the borders and in north Northumberland to encourage people to stay in the area, but we need some encouragement from the Government to show that they share our commitment and the commitment of the people of the borders and north Northumberland to get through these terrible difficulties and move on to a more optimistic future.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Calum Macdonald): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on instigating this debate, and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) for joining him in raising the important issue of the economic crisis in the borders and the question of economic development in that area and in north Northumberland. They have described the difficulties faced by the area most eloquently and pungently. Thanks to their previous representations and those of the local communities, which has resulted in a large postbag, the Government are very much aware of the problems.

I assure the House of the Government's continuing commitment to the borders and their awareness of the economic difficulties that the area faces. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland visited the borders on 2 and 3 November to hear at first hand about the problems and about the plans to strengthen the local economy. I have just returned from a visit to the borders, where I spoke to local people about their concerns, and about ways to improve the economic situation in the area.

There can be no doubt that the jobs lost at Dawson International and Viasystems mean that the area is facing difficult times. I fully sympathise with those made redundant by both firms, and I know that many small businesses are concerned that their own future is uncertain as a result.

I can assure the House that the Government did everything possible to save the jobs that have been lost. In particular, my noble Friend Lord Macdonald tried repeatedly to engage Viasystems in discussions about securing the future of the Galashiels and Selkirk plants, but, sadly, the company was not interested. I note that hon. Members are in discussion with the Secretary of State about the background to those events, and I am sure that those discussions will continue.

On 2 July, the Minister for Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), announced the Government's initial response to the job losses at Dawson International and the difficulties at Viasystems. The package included further funding of £1 million for Scottish Borders Enterprise, and the establishment of a rural inward investment team by Locate in Scotland to try to help areas such as the borders.

The Employment Service also moved quickly to establish rapid reaction teams when the closure of the Viasystems plants was announced. Those teams have been working hard to provide advice and assistance to those facing redundancy, and so far they have been successful in securing employment for 50 former Viasystems employees, and more than 900 have been put forward to prospective employers by the Employment Service. I also understand that 70 more former Viasystems employees have also found jobs without using the services of the rapid reaction teams.

Those initial actions show the seriousness of the Government's reaction to developments in the borders. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire asked that the Government stand ready to help Scottish Borders council in various projects that it is trying to develop. I can tell him that we stand ready to grant additional capital consent to the council for a specific project that is currently under discussion, if the company involved decides to go ahead with a proposed expansion.

The Government are very aware of the need to work in partnership with the local authority and the local enterprise company to deal with the economic problems in the area, not only immediately but in the longer term. At the end of August, my noble Friend the Minister who has responsibility for business and industry announced the establishment of the borders working party, which is chaired by a senior official in the Scottish Office, and is building on the useful work that the council and Scottish Borders Enterprise have done to try to deal with the problems in the area.

Although the core membership of the working party is made up of officials from the Scottish Office, Scottish Borders Enterprise and the council, the working party is also drawing on the experience and expertise of other local bodies as necessary.

The working party has met three times so far—most recently last week—and is developing initiatives to address short-term and longer-term economic problems. I can assure hon. Members that the working party is very aware of the need to press ahead with its work, and that it is doing so.

Hon. Members asked for details of an action plan for economic regeneration in the borders. I am sure that they will appreciate that some of the opportunities being

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

pursued by the working party will inevitably take time to develop, and of course many of them are also commercially confidential at this stage, so I cannot give any details to the House without endangering the projects.

I realise that, because of the need for commercial confidentiality, it may appear to people in the borders that not much is happening, and that that must be frustrating, but I can assure them that the members of the working party are pursuing any opportunity that has a realistic chance of bringing new investment to the borders.

There is, in particular, a clear need to broaden the company and sectoral base of the borders to promote longer-term sustainability. To that end, the working party will be drawing on work in progress on an economic strategy for the longer-term future of the borders and, separately, on training needs.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale asked when that interim report would be available. It is hoped that the borders working party will produce an interim report on its work around the end of this month. I hope very much that it will include some positive news for the area, as well as outlining a strategy for tackling the long-term economic challenges facing the area. We are committed to our on-going support for the work of the working party.

Hon. Members also asked about assisted area status for the borders. As they will know, the existing pattern of assisted areas across Great Britain is currently under review. The Government have invited views from a wide range of bodies, including local authorities, local enterprise companies and business, on the factors that should be taken into account in selecting areas for a new assisted areas map that will come into effect from January 2000.

I am aware that the Scottish Borders council has responded to that consultation exercise, pointing out the problems facing the area, and putting forward its case for priority when the new map is drawn up. I am sure that the House will appreciate that I cannot comment on the merits of individual areas before the review is completed, but it is clear that the present economic difficulties in the borders will demand serious consideration when decisions are taken on the coverage of the new map.

Hon. Members also raised the concerns of people in the borders about continued access to European structural funds—which was also the subject of our recent meeting. Those concerns were also raised with me yesterday in the borders, and I have heard similar concerns expressed in many other areas across Scotland. The Government's priority is a wider European Union, offering new business opportunities to firms in the United Kingdom, and I hope that borders firms will be at the forefront of those taking advantage of these opportunities.

To achieve a wider European Union, it is important to recognise the needs of acceding states, and balance the benefits brought by a wider union with the needs of areas within the United Kingdom, such as the borders. The safety net proposal to limit to one third the reduction in the population eligible for the new objective 2 compared with the current United Kingdom objective 2 and 5b eligibility will help us to balance those needs.

I have been impressed and encouraged by the collective and corporate approach taken by Scottish agencies, including local authorities, in making Scotland's case to the Commission. We will continue to press hard in Brussels to make sure that all the relevant parts of Scotland have the best chance of securing future European structural funds. I can also give the hon. Gentleman the assurance he seeks about investigating any potential underspend under objective 5b, although he will acknowledge that that potential will remain uncertain in the near future.

The Government recognise the particular difficulties that rural areas face in attracting inward investment, and that is why we decided to set up a rural inward investment team within Locate in Scotland. The team's role will be to seek out and pursue opportunities for inward investment projects that might be particularly suitable for location in rural areas.

Locate in Scotland will be able to do only a limited amount at its own hand, and will rely heavily on the trust, co-operation and creative approach of local agencies. It will also look to the local enterprise companies for much of its information on genuine local strengths. I know that members of the team have already had initial meetings with the chief executive of Scottish Borders Enterprise. Although I hope that the team will be successful in attracting more investment to rural areas, obviously its task will not be easy, and it would be wrong to expect over-dramatic results initially.

Hon. Members kindly mentioned last week's announcement of Government approval for the new A7 bypass in Hawick. The scheme will transfer traffic, which passes through the town when travelling along the A7, on to a new inner relief road. The scheme represents another example of strong partnership between the Scottish Office and Scottish Borders council, which will share the costs of the relief road. Obviously, the bypass will boost the economic potential of Hawick, but it will also benefit the borders as a whole by improving travelling times on the A7.

Mention was made of the potential for rail developments in the borders. When I was in the borders recently, I heard representations about the reopening of the Waverley line through the borders. I recognise that that project is widely supported by many throughout the area. I am aware of the plans promoted by Borders Future Transport for the line to be reinstated in three phases. The first phase is a freight-only line, and is being taken forward by means of private legislation procedure. Similar parliamentary powers will be need for the other phases.

The Scottish Office is in regular contact with Borders Future Transport about phase 1. Subject to parliamentary consideration, it is anticipated that Borders Future Transport will submit a formal application for freight facilities grant assistance to the Scottish Office. When that is done, it will be given every consideration.

The Scottish Office can also consider providing help for major transport improvements under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968, subject to the availability of funds.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed expressed concern about the difficulties of the Scottish borders, and pointed out that those difficulties were shared by north Northumberland. I am aware that economic changes seldom respect administrative boundaries. I am also aware that the right hon. Gentleman is a member of the Berwick regeneration task force, which brings together local interests with the Government office for the north-east, and a

representative of Scottish borders council. It is important that that partnership stretches across the border to ensure an integrated approach, and I can give the right hon. Gentleman the assurance he sought on co-operation with Scottish agencies as appropriate.

The right hon. Member mentioned the A1. He knows that it is being considered as part of the strategic roads review, and he will therefore understand that I can say nothing that might anticipate the review's outcome.

I hope that I have been able to convey the Government's determination to tackle the issues raised tonight by working in partnership with Scottish Borders council, with Scottish Borders Enterprise, with local businesses and—most important—with the local people. I hope that the steps outlined tonight and those in the pipeline from the working party will prove successful in promoting economic regeneration so that we have a long-term and thriving business sector in the borders; and that that can form the basis of long-term thriving communities in the borders and in north Northumberland.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 16 November 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Disability Living Allowance

1. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): How many applications for disability living allowance are currently under review or appeal; what was the corresponding figure 12 months ago; and if he will make a statement. [58366]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. John Denham): Last year at 31 October, there were 70,181 requests for a review of disability living allowance decisions in hand and 36,895 appeals. The corresponding figures for 31 October this year are 57,035 reviews and 36,011 appeals.

Mr. Llwyd: I now have several—in fact dozens—of constituents whose cases have been turned down, seemingly for no good reason. One person who is blind has been turned down, and an amputee who has also lost the use of an arm and has terrible vertebra problems has been turned down and deemed fit for work. How does all that square with the platitudes we heard last week about helping the disabled back to work? Is it not absolute nonsense and a disgrace?

Mr. Denham: It is essential that we get decisions on disability living allowance right in the first instance and that we take action to ensure that decisions remain correct. As a result of the benefit integrity project, we have changed our procedures to ensure that cases can be reviewed, with additional evidence if necessary. We shall continue to improve the process so as to ensure that the right benefit is paid to the right people. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we recently announced that, in due course, we wish to replace the benefit integrity project with a fair and sensitive system for ensuring that DLA cases are correct.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I welcome my hon. Friend's promise of a fairer system, because the current criteria are not so much stringent as appallingly harsh. Can he do something to reduce the waiting time for appeals to be heard? Nothing seems to have changed in that respect, which is deeply unfair to constituents who have burdens enough to shoulder without having to endure a long wait for an appeal hearing.

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend makes some important points. The gateways to DLA can be confusing, both to claimants and to those who are adjudicating the claims. That is why we are consulting on the nature of those gateways. I entirely accept that the length of waiting time for appeals is not acceptable. Following the Social Security Act 1998, we are bringing into play new procedures to speed up the system for appeals and we shall work hard to achieve that end.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): The Minister mentioned the benefit integrity project. A short while ago, we were told that that project was due to come to an end, which created in the newspapers the impression that the Government wanted to create, which is that it will come to an end in the immediate future. However, the fine text shows that that is not the case, for there is no due date for the end of the benefit integrity project—I dare say that some Labour Members will be rather shocked to hear that. Will the Minister tell us when the benefit integrity project is to come to an end and what is to be put in its place? Can we have a date, please?

Mr. Denham: It was, of course, the Conservative Government who initiated the benefit integrity project. We are keen to introduce the change as soon as possible, but it is important that we get it right. The benefit integrity project will continue until it is replaced by a new system—one which we shall ensure is both fair and sensitive. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear on 28 October 1998 that there would be no return to the situation that existed before April 1997, when nothing was being done to check that people were receiving the right benefit. The characteristics of the new system and when and how it will be introduced will be the subject of future discussions with the disability benefits forum.

Lone Parents

2. **Mr. Tony McNulty** (Harrow, East): If he will make a statement on progress on the new deal for lone parents. [58367]

7. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What assessment he has made of progress on the new deal for lone parents. [58372]

16. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): What progress has been made in helping lone parents to move into work. [58381]

18. **Mr. Shaun Woodward** (Witney): If he will make a statement on the progress of the new deal for lone parents. [58384]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): The new deal for lone parents, which became available nationwide on 26 October, for the first time offers all lone parents on income support a personal adviser service to help them to overcome the barriers to employment. Nine out of 10 lone parents who

attended an interview agreed to participate in the programme, and more than a quarter of those have moved into work.

Mr. McNulty: Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that all the key lessons of the pilot schemes for the new deal for lone parents will be learnt and incorporated into the national programme as it unfolds? Will he ignore the whingeing and carping of Conservative Members, who when they were in power, did absolutely nothing for lone parents?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. The new deal in general, and that for lone parents in particular, represents a major cultural change in the actions of the Department for Education and Employment and the Government. It was wrong to leave a growing number of lone parents out of the labour market when many could be substantially better off in work. The working families tax credit, which we shall introduce next year, will ensure that every working family is guaranteed an income for full-time work of at least £190 a week, but the Conservative party wants to scrap that measure.

Laura Moffatt: Does my right hon. Friend agree with me and Gemma, a lone parent adviser in my constituency, that lone parents have enthusiastically embraced the chance to go back to work? Does he agree also that immediate work may not be the only outcome and that lone parents understand that before they can embrace the world of work, training might be necessary, and that is what they are undertaking?

Mr. Darling: Again, my hon. Friend is right. Although Conservative Members may snigger, nine out of 10 lone parents who came for an interview joined the new deal. Some went into work and others needed to upgrade their qualifications, but the Conservative party would scrap the entire new deal and leave every one of those people high and dry. That is not the right approach for modern labour market conditions.

Mr. Miller: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that many of the failings of changes in the social security system under the previous Administration resulted from an appallingly bad level of training. Will he assure the House that when the scheme is implemented, proper training systems will be put in place?

Mr. Darling: Yes. It is very important that advisers are properly trained and skilled because often they are dealing with people who have difficult circumstances at home, perhaps because they do not have support and help to look after young children. It is important also to ensure that everybody realises the benefits that will come from the new deal, not least the fact that the Government's national child care strategy is now being fully rolled out to ensure that people have child care. The working families tax credit, in addition to ensuring that families in full-time work get at least £190 a week, provides significant help towards child care, which can be a major barrier that in the past has prevented lone parents from going into work.

Mr. Woodward: The Secretary of State will know that only 50,000 people have been invited to participate in the scheme, but the Department of Social Security's own research statistics reveal that only 2 per cent. have left income support. Does he agree that the scheme does not work? Will he think again, find a better scheme and tell the House the true cost, based on those who have left income support, of this scheme?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the pilot stage of the scheme has just ended and the national scheme was announced at the end of last month. I do not agree with his central premise. This country has a larger proportion of lone parents out of work than any other major European comparator country. The Government have a clear duty to encourage those who want to work to do so and to give them the opportunities that they were denied under the previous Government, which the hon. Gentleman supported. In this day and age the Government cannot stand by and watch an increasing number of people and their children be excluded from mainstream life—we would not be prepared to endorse that approach.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the Secretary of State agree that when the Government tell people that they will punish them if they do not do something, that will tend to make them feel that the act is for the Government's benefit, not for theirs? Does he therefore accept that the introduction of compulsion into the new deal will not help him make progress with it?

Mr. Darling: Of course the new deal does not contain an element of compulsion. We have always made it absolutely clear that for perfectly good reasons no one will compel a lone parent to go into work. The hon. Gentleman may be referring to a different programme—the new single gateway into the benefits system for people of working age. The Government clearly have a duty to do everything that they can to help people to get into work. In turn, everybody who comes into the benefits system should at the very least be prepared to sit down and find out what is on offer.

The history of the past 10 to 15 years shows that if people stay outside the labour market for too long, they tend to stay out indefinitely, and no responsible Government can put up with that. I hope that instead of complaining about matters, the hon. Gentleman and his party whole-heartedly endorse our approach because getting people into work must be the right way to deal with the problems that we have inherited. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees with that.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: There is no point of order. We are in the middle of questions.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I agree very much with my right hon. Friend's comments about extending opportunities to those outside the labour market who are coming on to benefit for the first time. Is he in a position to tell us what penalty will apply to those who do not turn up for their interview?

Mr. Darling: As I told my right hon. Friend when I made my statement a short time ago, we believe that it is

right that people who enter the system through the single gateway, when the system is fully operational, should be required to attend an interview as a condition of benefit.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful, Madam Speaker. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with his noble Friend Baroness Hollis who announced that sanctions will be put in place if a lone parent fails to attend the initial interview for the new deal for lone parents? If that is so, can he explain today exactly what form those sanctions will take? For how long will the sanctions apply? Will they apply only to child benefit or will the lone parent lose all benefits to which he or she would otherwise have been entitled?

Mr. Darling: I apologise to the hon. Lady. I was not clear why she was gesticulating at me a few moments ago. I understand that perhaps her question should have been grouped and, if that is my fault, I apologise.

Madam Speaker: It should not have been grouped. I expected to reach question No. 17, but it will now be withdrawn because I have called the hon. Lady.

Mr. Darling: I appreciate that, Madam Speaker. As to the hon. Lady's question, there is no compulsion in the new deal—as I have made clear. We are talking about the single gateway into the benefit system. That programme will be piloted over the next two to three years before it becomes a national scheme. When the single gateway is operational, it will be a condition of receiving benefit that people agree to attend an interview.

Disabled Children

3. **Mr. Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): What progress he is making in improving support for disabled children. [58368]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): In our consultation document on support for disabled people, we announced two particular proposals that will help the families of disabled children: first, the disability income guarantee, which is based on a new premium and income-related benefits for families with disabled children with the greatest care needs; and, secondly, the extension of the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance to children aged three and four for whom claims have not been accepted in the past.

Mr. Dobbin: While I support and welcome the Government's intention to extend the disability living allowance higher rate mobility component to three and four-year-olds and I support also the Government's commitment to protecting the poorer members of society, can the Minister assure me that those disability groups will be part of a real and proper consultation process so that they will be able to shape the legislation?

Mr. Timms: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support, and I can give him the assurance that he seeks. The disability benefits forum met last week and considered in detail the proposals in our consultation document. It will meet again next week and there will be a series of discussions with the disability organisations to which my hon. Friend referred about how to take the proposals forward. The proposals have been widely welcomed. They are a clear example of our resolve to re-focus the benefit system in order to provide additional help for those who need it most.

Family Credit

4. **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): If he will make a statement on the number of families who are currently eligible for family credit. [58369]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): In May 1998, 767,000 families were receiving family credit, which is 72 per cent. of those eligible but 84 per cent. of the maximum take-up if measured by expenditure.

Mr. Brazier: Can the Minister confirm that the programme currently costs about £3.5 billion, which is £1.5 billion less than the projected cost of the working families tax credit that should replace it? On what assumptions on employment is that projection of substantial increased cost based? Is it assumed that there will be a rise in such employment, or simply that the tax credit will reach much further up the income scale?

Angela Eagle: The working families tax credit, which will replace family credit in October 1999, is more generous. That is why it will cost £5 billion instead of the current cost of family credit. That will mean that it makes work pay for 400,000 more low-paid families.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Does the Minister accept that one of the great strengths of family credit is the fact that it copes well at the time of relationship breakdown, in that, typically, the money is paid to the mother in a couple, and therefore continues when the relationship breaks down? Does she accept that, when family credit is abolished and replaced by a benefit paid, typically, to the father in a couple, that will produce hardship for mothers and children at the time of relationship breakdown?

Angela Eagle: In fact, couples can choose who the working families tax credit will be paid to. The hon. Gentleman should also know that, in 50 per cent. of such families, the mother is the main breadwinner, so, generally, the benefit will be paid to her anyway. The hon. Gentleman is worrying overmuch about a system that is far more generous than is the existing system to those who are low-paid and want to work.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Does the Minister agree that one of the biggest problems with the current social security system is the fact that it places barriers in the way of people who want to work? Can she confirm that, under existing family credit regulations, people can be worse off if they work more hours, and can she confirm that that distortion will be removed by the working families tax credit? Will she reassure the House that the Government will progressively work, through the social security system, to ensure that such anomalies are ironed out once and for all?

Angela Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend; he is exactly right. The working families tax credit has far more generous tapers in income than does family credit—down from 70 per cent. to 55 per cent.—so the credit is withdrawn in a more generous way. It is also more generous in that it begins higher up the income scale, at £90 instead of £79 for family credit. It starts to tackle the unemployment traps, the benefit traps and the significant barriers to work that those who are on low pay or who may work part time currently face.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Minister has failed to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). Every year, the Government will spend on working families tax credit £1.5 billion more than has been spent on family credit, and in doing so they will make a mess of many of the main features of family credit. The Minister still has not said that the Department of Social Security or the Treasury have figures to show by how much the working families tax credit will increase employment and how much the Government will save in the medium or long term as a result of introducing that tax credit. Will she give us the answer now? What is the saving? How many extra jobs?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is against working families tax credit, and has said that he will abolish it. That will mean a tax increase for 1.5 million hard-working families of up to £17 a week.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Minister has not answered the question. The question was, what forecast has the Department made? If the Department is saying that it is prepared to spend an extra £1.5 billion a year, it must be predicated on an assumption of a saving elsewhere or more jobs; which is it? Or is the answer, "It may do this or it may not"? We have heard of the green shoots, but now this seems to be a policy of "The Darling Buds of May".

Angela Eagle: I think that the green shoots of economic policy were spoken of by a Conservative Chancellor, not a Labour Chancellor. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman will be quiet for a minute, I shall answer his question. The working families tax credit removes barriers to work and creates incentives for those who are on low pay to work. It is not intended to create more jobs. It is simply intended to make work pay for those people currently on benefit, who face levels of marginal deduction from benefit of considerably more than 100 per cent.—the legacy of the uncaring Conservative Government.

Disabled People

5. **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): What proposals he has to improve work opportunities for disabled people. [58370]

8. **Mr. Terry Rooney** (Bradford, North): What assessment he has made of the willingness of disabled people to move from welfare into work. [58373]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): We know that more than 1 million disabled people receiving state benefits want to work. Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, we have introduced the new deal for disabled people and proposals for a single gateway. I have also proposed reform of the all-work test. These and other measures will greatly improve opportunities for disabled people.

Mrs. Humble: One of the main problems facing disabled people seeking work is that they fear that they may lose benefits if the job does not work out. Can my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the Government are taking action to make sure that the protection offered by the benefit system is not withdrawn as soon as a disabled person takes the risk and goes into work?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Disabled people especially may be afraid to change their circumstances because in the past they believed that that would be to their disadvantage. Not only do we have advisers under the new deal who will give advice, but the 12-month linking rule will ensure that someone coming off benefit and going into work will be protected. However, I notice with deep regret that the Conservative party is opposing that rule. The disabled persons tax credit will also provide a guaranteed minimum income, in the same way as the working families tax credit. The Conservatives are against that as well. We are introducing other practical measures that will help to reduce the barriers that face many disabled people going into work. Our objective is to ensure that as many people who are disabled and who want to work can do so.

Mr. Rooney: The Secretary of State will be aware that many Labour Members have campaigned for many years for the right of disabled people to work. Will he confirm the amount of money that will be available under the new deal for people with disabilities, and how many people he expects to be placed in work through it?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend will know that £195 million is being spent on the new deal. The disabled persons tax credit, as I explained earlier, will mean that many disabled people will be substantially better off in work. That will operate together with other practical forms of help, some of which were announced a couple of weeks ago, such as the job introduction scheme, the disability rights commission and the supported employment programme.

Right across the board, we are doing everything that we can to make it easier for people with a disability to get into work and to stay in work. We are also, of course, encouraging employers to do everything that they can to keep people in work, rather than letting them go when a problem arises. The Government are committed to improving the situation that faces disabled people, and it is a matter of deep regret that many of the practical measures that we are introducing are bitterly opposed by the Conservative party.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Everyone will support and encourage schemes for getting disabled people who are able to work back into work. However, like the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy

(Mr. Llwyd), I have encountered in my constituency recently a number of cases of people who have been on disability living allowance for a considerable time, from whom that has been withdrawn under the new criteria, and who have been told that they are fit to go back to work. I interviewed them myself as a layman, and it is obvious to me that they are not fit to go back to work. Will the right hon. Gentleman look at the criteria again and make sure that they are not too harsh?

Mr. Darling: I shall try to deal with the points that the hon. Gentleman makes. First, disability living allowance is not an out-of-work benefit. It is designed to provide help with extra costs, whether someone is working or not. Secondly, no new criteria have been introduced. The benefit integrity project, which the hon. Gentleman will no doubt recall was introduced in the dying days of the previous Government, resulted in a number of people being excluded from benefit who probably should not have been excluded. That is why I want to replace that scheme with a fairer and better scheme that ensures that we get benefit right first time and avoid the situation that we inherited, where a third of people receiving DLA have no medical evidence to back up that award. The benefits system that we inherited, as the hon. Gentleman should know, left an awful lot to be desired. Our objective is to improve it.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman says that everybody would support measures to help people to get back into work. He had better have a word with those on his Front Bench, who are opposing measures that will come before the House tomorrow to institute the 12-month linking rule, which will be of great advantage to people with disabilities.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): Can the Secretary of State tell the House how many jobs he believes will be created from the £195 million under the pilot scheme for the new deal? Has the Department thought beyond that and recognised that billions, not millions, of pounds will be needed to tackle the 1 million disabled people who are able and want to get back to work?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. The new deal is not a job creation programme of the sort that we have seen in the past. Its object is to ensure that people are equipped and have the skills to get work. Many disabled people face additional barriers that others do not face. The point of the new deal and the other measures that we are introducing is to ensure that the disadvantages that have been visited upon disabled people are removed. I should have thought that he would do better supporting that proposition, rather than carping at its objectives.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): Given that people with very serious physical disabilities and learning difficulties are enabled to find employment through supportive employment projects, will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that there are not enough places and resources for such projects and, therefore, resources are spent on social security for people with disabilities who want to be in work? Is there scope for usefully transferring resources from my right hon. Friend's Department to the Department of Education and Employment so that we can have sensible social policy in this area?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend will know that both I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment are constantly examining ways in which we can ensure that people are in work and not on benefit. Our objective is to ensure that the bills that we have to meet because people are out of work who could be in work are reduced. We have taken considerable steps so far and we shall have further announcements to make. The supportive employment programme is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment rather than for my Department.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): The Secretary of State failed to answer the questions asked by the hon. Members for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) and for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). I suggest that they might care to read *Hansard*, where they will find that although the Government keep quoting that 1 million disabled people want to get into work, the figures for the projects that have been initiated by the Government suggest that the number of disabled people being helped into work by these projects is fewer than 20,000. Meanwhile the Government are changing the rules for incapacity benefit for those out of work because of their disability.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that in a full year 170,000 disabled people who now would qualify for incapacity benefit will, as a result of the Government's changes, be denied that benefit? Is this not just a callous attempt to redefine people off benefit to cover up the fact that the Government have failed to deliver real welfare reform?

Mr. Darling: I shall deal with the two points that the hon. Lady makes. First, on incapacity benefit, she must know that during the past 18 years when the Conservative party was in power it cynically used the incapacity benefit system to get people off the official unemployment figures and move them into statistics which received less attention.

The previous Government systematically went about trying to undermine the system that had been in place to ensure that help was there for people who were in work and became disabled. Incapacity benefit was never intended as an early retirement scheme, which is what the previous Government intended for it. If welfare reform means anything it must mean modernising the benefit system to ensure that benefits go to those who are entitled to them and to those for whom they were intended. That certainly did not happen under the previous Government.

Secondly, the hon. Lady asks about the working families tax credit and the new deal. The Conservative party is against both measures. It is against any measures that are designed to help people who have been excluded from the labour market. I remind the hon. Lady that at present there are about 200,000 vacancies notified in job centres and that some disabled people could go into them. The object of our reforms is to ensure that some of these vacancies can be filled by those who have disabilities. Unfortunately all these measures are opposed by the Conservative party.

Housing Benefit

6. **Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): What proposals he has for the future of housing benefit. [58371]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): We are taking forward a wide-ranging review of housing benefit in consultation with local authorities and other interested parties. This review will aim to simplify and improve both the benefit itself and the way in which it is delivered. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has announced an improvement to the extended payments scheme to make the transition into work easier for housing benefit claimants who are unemployed.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What is the Government's estimate of the cost to the taxpayer of landlord fraud perpetrated on the housing benefit system? Can my hon. Friend tell us how many landlords have been successfully prosecuted for such fraud?

Angela Eagle: The Government's estimates of the extent of landlord fraud range from £100 million to £150 million. Unfortunately, we do not collect figures for fraud prosecutions by type, so I cannot answer my hon. Friend's second inquiry.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Following the revelations of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), is it not an open secret that when decisions are eventually taken on this matter—or, more likely, when the Government definitively run away from them—as with all the other decisions on which we are waiting for them to pronounce, such as welfare reform and pensions, they are determined not by the Department of Social Security but by the Treasury and the No. 10 policy unit? Will the right hon. Gentleman answer a simple and, for him, fundamental question: if the Benefits Agency and, in the case of housing benefit, local authorities, have the job of handing out the money, and if policy decisions in Whitehall are taken by the Treasury or No. 10, what is the point of having a DSS at all?

Angela Eagle: First, I should like to point out that I am an hon. Lady, not an hon. Gentleman—in case the hon. Gentleman did not know.

The simplification project that we are carrying out with local authorities is seriously intended to make housing benefit simpler to administer and easier to understand. Delays and complexities in housing benefit are major barriers that prevent people from entering work, and we are determined to tackle them.

Child Support Agency

9. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): How many outstanding cases are presently with the Child Support Agency waiting to be closed where the child concerned is of employable age. [58374]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): A parent with care is required to notify the Child Support Agency if a child stops receiving full-time education. Because those changes are recorded only when the assessment is reviewed, it is not possible to say how many cases are waiting to be closed.

Helen Jackson: I was always struck by the promptness and efficiency of the family allowance system, because the week my children left school and ceased to be dependent, my family allowance stopped. Why cannot the Child Support Agency be as efficient when dependants for whom people pay out of their earnings reach independence? People often find themselves paying deductions from earnings orders for six months or more after that threshold. Is that not another symptom of the gross inefficiency of the CSA, which has come to epitomise the muddle and incompetence of the former Administration that set it up?

Angela Eagle: I have considerable sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. Believe it or not, as part of the Tory legacy that we inherited, the child benefit computer system cannot talk to the child support computer system and identify when the children whom it was set up to support have reached a certain age. We are doing all that we can to remedy that, and will be in a position to identify that fact manually by next year. As part of the ACCORD computer procurement project announced recently, we hope to put that right permanently.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Neither the previous question nor the answer were fair. Unlike family allowance, child support does not finish when a child reaches employable age. An absent parent has always provided support while a child is in full-time education or training, which is why child support will always be a much more complex benefit. There will always be circumstances in which teenagers will go on to full-time education or training, and they should be supported by the absent parent if he or she is in a position to support them.

Angela Eagle: Child support is bound to be more complex than child benefit, but the system should not have been as complex as the Conservative Government made it when they introduced it. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that child support does not automatically stop at the age of 16. However, there remains the issue of whether, once education is finished, whatever the child's age, child support is still payable. If those computer systems could talk to each other, at least a prompt would be given so that members of the CSA could check with the parent with care to see whether those circumstances had changed. At present, the parent with care has to notify the CSA to get changes made. Inevitably, that takes time and some people forget to do it.

10. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What action his Department has taken to improve the support for children provided by the benefits system. [58375]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): We have increased the premium for children under 11 on income-related benefits from this November and we are also increasing child benefit by a record amount from April next year.

Helen Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I represent a constituency containing some of the most deprived wards of north Cheshire, which have a high proportion of lone parents. In one ward, nearly a quarter of children are in lone-parent families. Can he assure the House that they, too, will share in any increases in benefits and that we will set out to tackle the poverty which undoubtedly exists in such families?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend will know that the Chancellor took a deliberate decision in his previous Budget to ensure that not only child benefit, but the premiums paid for those in receipt of income-related benefits would be increased. The help that we are giving through the new deal for lone parents and the introduction of the working families tax credit—both of which are opposed by the Conservatives—will offer substantial assistance to the very people to whom my hon. Friend has referred. That is a far better use of public money than the proposal that the Conservative party has come up with today—to spend between £3 billion and £5 billion per annum on a transferable tax allowance. It would be far better to spend that money in a far more targeted way—to help people to get back into work as well as to help those on the lowest incomes.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): May I ask why a lone parent with the same income as a married couple with a single income will do considerably better under the working families tax credit? It cannot have been the Government's objective to discriminate deliberately against married couples and their children, but that is the way that the finances work out.

Mr. Darling: The Government's objective is to provide the maximum help that they can to all families—couples as well as lone parents. The working families tax credit is designed to make work pay for both types of family and to remove some of the barriers to work—the disincentives—under the scheme that we inherited. We believe that that is the best possible use of public money, because helping people into work and off benefit must and should be a central objective of any civilised Government.

Benefit Integrity Project

11. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): How many people have been taken off benefit as a result of the benefit integrity project. [58376]

13. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): If he will make a statement on the replacement for the benefit integrity project. [58378]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): By 30 September, 138,000 cases had been checked under the benefit integrity project. Of those, 32,500 people were found initially not to be receiving the right amount of benefit. The number fell to 29,300, after the reviews and appeals that have been completed so far.

It is right to check whether people are receiving the correct rate of benefit, but the benefit integrity project, as conceived by the previous Government, was flawed in two specific respects. First, it was insensitive to the circumstances of disabled people—we have made a number of improvements—and, secondly, it focused only on people with high rates of disability living allowance so that payment changes could, in the great majority of cases, be downwards only.

That is why we plan to replace BIP with a new system—part of the routine administration of the benefit—which is sensitive to people's circumstances and which is fair, because it will apply to all benefit rates and so result in upward, or downward, revisions to ensure that people are receiving the correct amount of benefit.

Mr. Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, with which I agree whole-heartedly. Can he tell us how soon the new system, which needs to be introduced urgently, will come in? Can he assure us that it will not include the coercive aspects of the benefit integrity project? They have clouded the debate on disablement and benefit with a fog of fear and alarm which is felt by those who think that they are being coerced and subjected to a shake down to get them off the benefit that they had received from the previous Administration. We should deal with fraud, but not at the expense of inducing terror among those people who are entitled to benefit.

Mr. Timms: We intend to learn from the many lessons of the BIP experience and to introduce the new system as soon as possible, but it is important that we get it right. We do not want to rush into a new system without properly planning for it. We want to ensure, for example, that staff are properly trained by the time that the new arrangements start. The disability benefits forum set up a working group last week to work with us to plan how those new arrangements should work. We will put them in place as soon as we can sensibly do so.

Mr. Syms: Following the announcement of the scrapping of the benefit integrity project, people who have been assessed or are about to be assessed are concerned that they will face the double jeopardy of being processed through a new system. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, it is important that we have a date and guidelines for the establishment of the new system, because there is great concern in the disabled community. I hope that the Minister will be a little more precise. Was the announcement of the new system an aspiration for the next century, or will it be implemented early next year?

Mr. Timms: No. We are in discussion with the disability benefits forum about the arrangements that will replace BIP. We are not yet able to say precisely when the new arrangements will start, but I reassure the hon. Gentleman's constituents that there will be no question of a double jeopardy as he described. The current arrangements will continue until we have a properly planned and worked-out system with which to replace them.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Does the hon. Gentleman not understand the contradiction in the assurances that he has just given to his Back-Bench Friends? He implied that the benefit integrity project will end some time in the next century. He also suggested that things will be a little easier. Sources close to the Secretary of State have said that the Government intend to save 25 per cent. of the benefits budget. The implication of that is straightforward: people currently on benefit—legitimately, not through fraud—will lose. The Secretary of State has suggested that, for some people, the medical evidence for granting disability living allowance is not immediately obvious. Will Ministers second-guess medical opinion? Will the Minister tell us who will lose?

Mr. Timms: That question contained a number of disconnected points. There is no truth in the hon. Gentleman's allegation about a 25 per cent. saving. It is important that the Department and claimants are confident that they are receiving the correct amount of benefit. The previous Government introduced the BIP programme, which was designed to move people from high to lower rates of benefit. That was wrong and unfair. We will introduce arrangements that are fair and apply to all levels of disability living allowance, so that we can be certain that people are receiving the amount of benefit to which they are entitled. That is right for them, for the Department, for the Government and for society. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will apologise on behalf of the Conservative party for the BIP scheme that he supported, and that he will support the new arrangements that we will put in place.

Family Credit

14. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What estimate he has made of the take–up rate for family credit for 1998–99. [58379]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): As I told the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), family credit take-up, by case load, is estimated to be 72 per cent., but measured by levels of expenditure it is 84 per cent.

Mr. Amess: Will the extra £1.5 billion being spent on the working families tax credit introduce other families to dependency, including higher earners? Will the hon. Lady explain why, under the new system, it will be more financially advantageous to look after other people's children than to look after one's own?

Angela Eagle: To be honest, I do not understand why the Conservative party insists on thinking that a more generous tax credit, with lower tapers which create pathways into work for the lowest paid, increases dependency. Conservative Members have a bizarre view of the benefits system.

Disability Benefits

15. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): What medical training or advice is available to adjudication officers in the Benefits Agency and independent tribunal service members when establishing the eligibility of claimants for disability benefits. [58380]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): There are separate arrangements for Benefits Agency adjudication officers and members of independent tribunals. Benefits Agency adjudication officers complete 12 weeks' technical training in adjudication, which, in the case of disability living allowance, includes sessions given by doctors about the effects of disabling conditions on a person's need for help with personal care and mobility. Once trained, they have access to the disability handbook, a new edition of which was published recently, and, formally and informally, to doctors working under contract to the Benefits Agency.

The Independent Tribunal Service provides members with training in disability awareness and relevant legislation. Of the three tribunal members, there is always one who is medically qualified and another who has professional or personal experience of the effects of disability.

Mr. Chapman: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. However, in a recent case involving a constituent who was appealing against a reduction in disability living allowance, the appellant was told both that there was no point in proceeding with the appeal because the result was inevitable and that the ITS had no knowledge of his disability. Does not that suggest that, despite the training given, further training on medical matters and interpersonal skills is required? Indeed, the number of letters in my postbag about the ITS suggests that the training need may be greater still.

Mr. Timms: I know that my hon. Friend has been concerned about the case of his constituent, and has been pursuing it. If he remains dissatisfied and would like to write to me, I shall be glad to investigate. The judicial aspect of ITS is the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor's Department; we are introducing new arrangements for appeals in order to improve the service.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Does the Minister agree that the benefit integrity project has demonstrated the inadvisability of lifetime awards, and the necessity for proper medical examination in all cases in which benefits are awarded?

Mr. Timms: I agree with both points. We intend to introduce legislation to end the use of the term "lifetime award", which is a confusing and unfortunate feature of the system introduced by the previous Government. It has always been the case that, if people's benefit entitlement is reduced because of a change in their circumstances, the benefit is reduced. We will clarify that as soon as we can.

I also agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for clear evidence to support all disability benefit claims.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does my hon. Friend agree that a general practitioner who has long-standing experience of his patient's case, and knows the extent of that patient's disability, may feel very irritated if his judgment is cast aside following a brief examination by another doctor? Will my hon. Friend take that into account in his intended reform of the benefit integrity project?

Mr. Timms: In fact, information from a claimant's own GP can be used in the determination of benefit entitlement, and we intend that to continue.

Housing Benefit

20. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** (Wealden): What plans he has to review housing benefit. [58386]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) in

response to an earlier question, we are currently reviewing housing benefit with the aim of simplifying and improving its administration.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I am well aware that that review is a review of legislation passed in 1990, but will it also take into account an anomaly known to hon. Members on both sides of the House? Poor council tenants are having to subsidise rent rebates for those who are even less well off. In those circumstances, it is little wonder that my local authority, Wealden district council, has incurred a £2 million bill to help them on their way—money that could be far better spent on investment in housing, repairs and maintenance and better facilities for the disabled.

Angela Eagle: I can confirm that the review is wide-ranging, and is examining a number of aspects of a benefit that is complex and difficult to deliver. Under the previous Government there was a massive shift from subsidy for bricks and mortar to subsidy for rent, via the housing benefit system. It is difficult even to think of reviewing housing benefit without taking housing policy into account: we must consider the two together.

Disabled Children

21. **Ms Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): If he will make a statement on the action he is proposing to take to support disabled children. [58387]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): We have announced two proposals for significant improvements in support for disabled children: the disability income guarantee, and the extension of the higher-rate mobility component of disability living allowance to children aged three and four. Disabled children will also be among those who benefit from our package on child poverty, the £1.5 billion programme on working families tax credit and the £300 million project for the national child care strategy.

Ms Lawrence: I welcome the extension of the mobility component of DLA to disabled children aged three and four. Many families in my constituency will appreciate it. Can my hon. Friend also say whether families of those children will have access to the Motability scheme? I am sure that he will appreciate the tremendous difficulties with transport for such families.

Mr. Timms: I thank my hon. Friend for her support and for raising an important point. I can confirm the important point that the change will convey with it access to the Motability scheme. That scheme, which celebrates its 21st anniversary next month, can provide a vehicle, vehicle adaptations or an electric wheel chair. Recent research has shown that children as young as three and four can suffer if their mobility needs are not met. Our proposals will be an important step forward for those children and will allow their families access to Motability.

Disability Living Allowance

23. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): What representations he has received concerning disability living allowance reforms. [58390]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): A list of more than 1,000 organisations and individuals who responded to the welfare reform Green Paper is in the House of Commons Library, most of them touching on disability issues. As we promised in the Green Paper, we have established a disability benefits forum, which has a working group dealing specifically with reforms to the disability living allowance. The Select Committee on Social Security also published a valuable report on DLA on 20 May.

Mr. Evans: Can the Minister give the House an estimate of how many people he believes are receiving disability living allowance who should not be entitled to it? How many of those who appeal when they lose DLA have that payment restored? May I ask him to ensure that appeals are held as quickly as possible once a claimant lodges an appeal?

Mr. Timms: Perhaps I can draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the figures that I gave some moments ago. I said that, so far, 138,000 cases under BIP had been checked and, of those, 32,500 people were found initially not to be receiving the right benefit. That number fell to 29,300, after the reviews and appeals that have been completed so far.

The hon. Gentleman's question gives me the opportunity to make one important point. The level of fraud in disability living allowance is very low: the level of confirmed fraud is about 1.5 per cent. The level of incorrectness is greater than that. It is important to distinguish between those two things and to make it clear to the House that the level of fraud is very low.

Benefits (Personal Advisers)

25. **Mr. Ian Pearson** (Dudley, South): What services will be offered by the personal adviser to people applying for benefits through the single gateway. [58393]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): The personal adviser will help benefit claimants of working age to explore ways in which they can overcome barriers that prevent participation in the labour market. The adviser will be able to provide information and advice on the options that are available and a personalised calculation of potential in-work income.

The personal adviser will also help individuals to gain access to a range of services such as child care provision, specialist counselling, housing support and training.

Mr. Pearson: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Any measure that sensibly cuts bureaucracy and introduces clarity into the system has to be welcomed, but can she help to explain whether we are talking about one gateway or two? Do people have one personal adviser or two? Can she assure me that just one person is advising people on the gateway and those who enter the new deal?

Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend must not mix up the new deal programmes that have been launched throughout the country with the 12 pilots of the single gateway, which will begin in June next year and be extended in

November. We hope to learn lessons from those pilots and then consider whether to extend them throughout the benefit system.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Patrick Hall? Mrs. Sylvia Heal? Mr. Andrew Mackinlay?

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am here.

Hon. Members: Not for long, though.

National Insurance

29. **Mr. Mackinlay:** What plans he has to change the rules on employers' contributions to the national insurance fund. [58397]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): I am delighted that my hon. Friend is here.

From April 1999, the point at which employers start to pay secondary class 1 contributions will be raised to a new "earning threshold" set at the level of the personal tax allowance—which is £83 per week, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on 3 November, in the pre-Budget report. Additionally, the current multiplicity of employers' contribution rates for different earnings levels will be abolished and replaced with a single 12.2 per cent. contribution rate payable on earnings above the new earnings threshold. Employers will no longer have to pay contributions on the portion of earnings below the earnings threshold.

Provision for the changes was made in the Social Security Act 1998—which made provision also for the introduction of a new class 1B employers' national insurance contribution, so that treatment of contributions on payments and benefits to employees included in a pay-as-you-earn settlement agreement can be aligned with the tax treatment. Regulations to give effect to all those changes will be laid before both Houses in due course.

Mr. Mackinlay: I concentrated on that reply with considerable vigour. May I ask the Minister what he will do about employers—such as P and O Stena, and Cable and Wireless—who have the practice of paying their employees offshore, thereby avoiding paying national insurance contributions? That practice is not only unfair but unpatriotic. Should it not be stopped, immediately, by legislation? What does he say?

Mr. Timms: I am aware of the concerns expressed by hon. Friend, which we are closely examining.

Iraq

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I shall make a statement on the situation in Iraq.

As the House will know, on Saturday I had authorised substantial military action as part of a joint US-UK strike against targets in Iraq. British Tornado fighter bombers were about to take to the air, and I had already spoken to the detachment commander to thank the detachment for its bravery and professionalism, when we received word that the Iraqis were telling the United Nations Secretary-General that they had backed down. I should like to explain to the House why we were ready to take such action, why we decided to stay our hand, and why we remain ready to strike if the Iraqis do not fully comply with their obligations.

Let me first put the events in context. Security Council resolution 687 of April 1991, containing the ceasefire terms for the Gulf war, obliged Iraq to accept the destruction of all its weapons of mass destruction and not to develop such weapons in the future. The United Nations Special Commission was established to oversee those processes, with the International Atomic Energy Agency. A further resolution required immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access to any places and records in Iraq that inspectors wished to inspect.

The seven years since then have been a constant struggle between Iraq and the weapons inspectors, who have been backed by the full authority of the UN. The inspectors themselves have been harassed and threatened. Iraq has deceived and concealed and lied at every turn. A deliberate mechanism to hide existing weapons and to develop new ones has been in place, involving organisations close to Saddam Hussein, particularly his Special Republican Guard.

Despite all the obstruction, UNSCOM and the IAEA have been remarkably successful in uncovering and destroying massive amounts of weaponry, particularly following the defection of Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, Hussein Kamel, in 1995. He was murdered on his return to Iraq the following year.

UNSCOM has destroyed, for example, more than 38,000 chemical weapon munitions, 690 tonnes of chemical weapon agents and 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals. Furthermore, 48 Scud missiles have been destroyed, as has a biological weapons factory designed to produce up to 50,000 litres of anthrax, botulism toxin and other agents. Without the weapons inspectors, that deadly arsenal would have been available to Saddam Hussein to use against his neighbours. Who can say with any confidence that he would not already have used it?

Huge question marks remain, for example, over 610 tonnes of unaccounted-for precursor chemicals for the nerve gas VX; over imports of growth media capable of producing huge amounts of anthrax; and over missile warheads, particularly those designed for chemical and biological weapons. Iraq has denied weaponising VX, but analysis of missile warhead fragments in a US laboratory showed traces of VX. Further tests were carried out in French and Swiss laboratories. A multinational group of experts concluded in late October that the original US tests were accurate, that the French laboratory had found evidence consistent with the trace of a nerve gas on one fragment, and that all three laboratories had found evidence of Iraqi attempts to decontaminate the warheads.

The simple truth therefore is that, before the Gulf war, Iraq had built up a vast arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. It has been trying to hide them, and to acquire more, ever since. Despite UNSCOM, Iraq still has weapons of mass destruction capability. We do not know precisely how many, but it still has the skills, the engineers and the equipment to make more. Saddam Hussein has used these weapons before, including on his own people. I am in no doubt that he would use them again, given half a chance.

Let us not forget either that Saddam's conventional military capabilities remain at a very high level: more than 1 million men under arms, including 75,000 in the Republican Guard and 15,000 members of the Special Republican Guard, 2,700 main battle tanks and nearly 400 combat aircraft. That is what he continues to spend his money on, rather than the welfare of his own people.

In October 1997, Iraq sought to exclude US personnel from UNSCOM teams. In the face of international pressure, the Iraqis backed down then, but continued to try to impose controls on the so-called presidential sites. In January 1998, Iraq again objected to US and UK personnel, made explicit a ban on access to eight presidential sites, and threatened to end co-operation with UNSCOM if it had not completed its work by May 1998. We, the Americans and others made it clear that we would use force if Saddam did not change his mind.

On that occasion, Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the UN, negotiated a memorandum of understanding under which Iraq confirmed its acceptance of all relevant Security Council resolutions and its readiness to co-operate fully with UNSCOM and the IAEA. This averted military action at the 11th hour. The Security Council's endorsement of this MOU stressed that any violation of it would have the severest consequences for Iraq.

Iraq subsequently resumed superficial co-operation, but on 5 August this year suspended everything but the most routine monitoring when its demand for a declaration saying that it had fulfilled all its disarmament obligations was rejected. A further Security Council resolution in September suspended reviews of sanctions in consequence but endorsed the idea of a comprehensive review of Iraq's compliance with its obligations.

On 30 October, the Security Council unanimously agreed terms of reference for the review, holding out the clear prospect of a statement of the steps that Iraq still had to take, and of the likely time frame for their completion, assuming full co-operation by Iraq. Astonishingly, this offer was rejected by Iraq on 31 October, and the Iraqis then announced that they were ceasing all co-operation with UNSCOM. The Security Council unanimously condemned this on 5 November as a flagrant violation of Iraq's obligations.

I have set this out in detail because it is important that we understand what is at stake. We are talking not about technical breaches of UN resolutions, but about a pattern of behaviour that continues to pose huge actual risks for Iraq's neighbours, the middle east and the entire international community.

Let me now return to the events of the last few days. Following the Iraqi decision to break off co-operation with UNSCOM on 31 October, despite the offer of a

[The Prime Minister]

comprehensive review, we and the Americans decided that if Saddam Hussein did not return to full compliance very quickly, we were ready to mount an air attack to reduce substantially Iraq's threat to its neighbours, in particular by degrading its weapons of mass destruction capability, and its ability to develop, control and deliver such weapons.

We did not want a lengthy military build-up of the kind that there had been in February, or endless rhetorical warnings, but we did make it clear that if Iraq did not return to full compliance very quickly indeed, it would face a substantial military strike. A private warning was delivered directly to the Iraqi permanent representative at the UN on Thursday 12 November, giving no details about timing, but leaving no doubt about the scale of what was intended.

Saturday afternoon, London time, was set for the start of the attack. I gave final authorisation that morning for the use of force. I did so with regret, and with a deep sense of responsibility. I saw no credible alternative. The UK's weight in the planned strike would have been substantial, including nearly 20 per cent. of the tactical bomber effort.

Just over two hours before the attack was due to start, we received word that the Iraqis had told the United Nations Secretary-General that they were responding positively to a final letter of appeal which he had sent to them the previous night. We decided that the attack should be put on hold for 24 hours to give us a chance to study the details of the Iraqi response.

The first Iraqi letter appeared to agree to resume co-operation with UNSCOM and the IAEA. It was described as unconditional by Iraqi spokesmen, but the full text of the letter, and in particular nine assurances that the Iraqis were seeking about the comprehensive review—they were listed in an annex—left that unclear. We and the Americans spelled out that that was unacceptable, and that there could be no question of any conditions.

During the course of Saturday night and Sunday morning, the Iraqis offered a stream of further written and oral clarifications, making it clear that their compliance was unconditional, that the nine points were merely a wish-list, not conditions, that their decisions of August and October to withdraw co-operation had been formally rescinded, and that the weapons inspectors would be allowed to resume the full range of their activities in accordance with UN resolutions, without let or hindrance. I have placed the text of the Iraqi letters in the Library of the House.

The clarifications, taken together, mean that Saddam Hussein has completely withdrawn his positions of August and October. No concessions of any kind were offered to him in exchange. There was no negotiation of any kind. Nor could there have been. Nor will there be in future.

We do not take Iraqi words at face value. Long experience has taught us to do the opposite. However, we had asked for unconditional resumption of co-operation, and, in the face of the credible threat of force—in this case very imminent force—Iraq offered that resumption. In those circumstances, we and the Americans have suspended further military action while we bolt down every detail of what the Iraqis have said, and while we test the words in practice. The Security Council decided last night that UNSCOM and IAEA inspectors should resume their work in Iraq immediately. They will be in Iraq tomorrow, and they must be afforded full co-operation in every respect.

As ever, we do not rely on the good faith of Saddam Hussein. He has none. We know, however, that under threat of force, we can make him move. We will be watching with extreme care and a high degree of scepticism. Our forces remain in place and on high alert. We and the Americans remain ready, willing and able to go back to the use of force at any time. There will be no further warnings. The inspectors will now carry out their work.

There are in my view two substantial and fundamental differences between the Iraqi climbdown this time and the climbdown in February. First, there is now a very clear diplomatic basis for action without further need for long discussion in the Security Council or elsewhere. In February, we allowed a long time for negotiations. This time we allowed only a short period. If there is a next time, there will be not even that. If there is a next time, everyone will know what to expect, as President Chirac and others have made clear.

Secondly, the world can see more clearly than ever that Saddam Hussein is indeed intimated by the threat of force. Many so-called experts told us that Saddam wanted military action—even needed it—to shore up his position internally and in the region. His complete collapse on Saturday gives the lie to such bogus analysis. When he finally saw, correctly, that we were ready to use force on a substantial scale, he crumbled. I hope that other countries more dubious of the use of force may now see that Saddam is moved by the credible threat of force. He has exposed the fact that his fear is greater than his courage. Let us learn the lesson of that.

If there is a next time, I shall have no hesitation in ordering the use of force. President Clinton's position is the same. The USA and the UK, with far greater international support than ever before, have Saddam Hussein trapped. If he again obstructs the inspectors' work, we will strike. There will be no warnings, no wrangling, no negotiation and no last-minute letters. The next time co-operation is withdrawn, he will be hit.

We have no quarrel with the people of Iraq. On the contrary, we support the desire of the overwhelming majority of them for freedom from Saddam Hussein. They find themselves in a desperate position. I have no doubt of the genuine suffering of many, though not, of course, the elite and those who keep in them in power. We do what we can through our aid programme. Under the oil for food arrangements, the Iraqis can import as much food and medicine as they want, and I hope that we will hear no more echoes here of cynical and hypocritical Iraqi propaganda about this. If Saddam Hussein wants to import more, he can do so freely. If he wants the sanctions position to change, the solution is in his hands through fulfilment of his obligations.

This is far from over. It is merely in a different phase. Our course is set: complete compliance and nothing less, and we shall not be moved from that course.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and in particular welcome the willingness that the Government and the

United States have shown to use force to ensure Saddam Hussein's compliance with UN resolutions. Last week, we pledged support for the use of force, should it prove necessary. The Opposition also support the Prime Minister's decision at the weekend to authorise the use of RAF aircraft. We join him in commending the bravery and preparedness of the RAF personnel involved in the mission—no less for the fact that they did not in the event go into action. We welcome Saddam Hussein's apparent assurances that he will allow UN inspectors complete and unconditional access to suspected illegal weapons sites, as well as the Prime Minister's statement that if there is any future breach of the undertakings that Iraq has given, air strikes will be launched without further warning.

At the same time, the Prime Minister will no doubt share our concern, first, that the crisis through which we have just passed represents the second time this year that Saddam Hussein has broken his word and failed to comply with UN resolutions; secondly, that he may still be playing for time and testing the west's resolve; and thirdly that these exercises in brinkmanship are being regularly repeated.

Does the Prime Minister accept the Opposition's continuing strong support for maintaining a tough line against Iraq until the complete destruction of that country's biological and chemical weapons capability has been achieved? Does he further accept that we believe that this determination should embrace sanctions as well, and that the lie should be nailed that the sanctions currently in place are depriving the Iraqi people of food and medical supplies? The Prime Minister made the important point that the continuing suffering of many Iraqis is the direct responsibility of their own regime. Given that Iraq can now sell more than $10 billion of oil annually to pay for food, medicine and other humanitarian goods, should not the blame for the deprivation of the Iraqi people be placed firmly at the door of Saddam Hussein himself, who chooses to spend the money on weapons of war and the luxurious life style of his entourage?

Given that it has repeatedly proved impossible to negotiate in good faith with Saddam Hussein, does the Prime Minister associate the Government with President Clinton's statement:

"what we want and what we will work for is a government in Iraq that represents and respects its people . . . and one committed to live in peace with its neighbours."?

We all hope that Saddam Hussein is indeed now trapped, but as the Prime Minister said, this matter is far from over. Will he go further and agree that Saddam's continued breaches of faith, and the continuing threat to peace that he presents to the whole of the middle east and thus to the interests of the United Kingdom, mean that although we acknowledge the formidable difficulties involved, a prime objective of western policy should now be the removal of Saddam from power?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support and his party's support in the past few days. Of course we want to see the Iraqi people governed by a regime other than that of Saddam Hussein. We are looking with the Americans at ways in which we can bolster the opposition and improve the possibility of removing Saddam Hussein altogether. I entirely share the sentiments that President Clinton expressed on that point.

I also agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the continued suffering of the Iraqi people. We have to be blunt about it. I have no doubt at all that Saddam Hussein will not fulfil the obligations that he has now entered into unless he is made to do so, but what is interesting and different about the present situation is that this time he was able to see that we had given the authorisation to strike. Indeed, until late Saturday morning, that decision had been taken and was literally minutes away from being implemented. Therefore, no one can doubt the credibility of our willingness to use force and, most important of all, Saddam Hussein no longer doubts that.

What is more, precisely because of the build-up that there has been over a period of months, we are in a far stronger position. Reading between the lines of what Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, said, it is clear that he accepts—as does the entire international community—that the next time there will be no formal negotiation at all. If Saddam Hussein withdraws co-operation, action will follow, irrespective of last-minute pleas, letters and the rest. It is that simple. That represents a significant difference from the position in February.

I also emphasise the other point that I made. I was astounded, because I did not accept the argument, by the number of people who genuinely and in good faith thought that Saddam Hussein would welcome military action and that he needed it to bolster his position. According to so-called experts, it was all part of his ploy and he wanted military action as it would strengthen his position. My goodness—the moment he thought and knew that we were serious about military force, a very different song was sung by those who were speaking for Iraq. The fact that that changed in a fundamental way places us in a very good position.

I should make it quite clear to the House again, however, that this will not be over until the inspectors are in there and have completed their work to their satisfaction; or alternatively, because Saddam Hussein fails to co-operate again, until we have by military force diminished and degraded his capability to threaten the neighbourhood and the outside world. One of two things will now happen: either he will co-operate, in which case inspectors will do their job, or he will fail to co-operate and, as we have made quite clear, force will follow.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North–East Fife): I offer my support to the Prime Minister for his statement and for the Government's conduct of these affairs in recent days. In his statement, the Prime Minister refers to a clear diplomatic basis for military action. Is he satisfied that there is clear legal authority for military action? Does he agree that one of the most effective parts of the diplomatic effort against Saddam Hussein was the intervention of a number of Arab states towards the end of last week, in particular Egypt and Syria? Does he agree that it is necessary to seek to maintain the support of Arab opinion; in that regard will he confirm that we will be evenhanded in our application of United Nations Security Council resolutions throughout the entire middle east?

Will the Prime Minister confirm that sanctions are related to compliance and not to the survival in power of Saddam Hussein, and that if there is full compliance all sanctions can be lifted? Finally, will he confirm that,

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

notwithstanding Saddam Hussein's behaviour, we will redouble our efforts to bring humanitarian assistance to those whom Saddam Hussein has so cruelly exploited?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for the support that his party gave for the action that we took. Yes, we are sure that we have—and will have in future—proper legal authority for the action that we were about to take. The support of the Arab states in their statement last week was significant and has strengthened our position. Although it is frustrating for us, when people see that we are prepared to give Iraq every chance to come into compliance, that is an important part of building up the strongest possible diplomatic support. Obviously we want to maintain that.

The fact that, thanks to the intervention of President Clinton and others, the middle east peace process is back within a framework that gives it some chance of success is an indication to the Arab world that we wish to be even-handed in our approach and that we simply want to maintain the security of the region in all its different forms.

The sanctions are, of course, related to compliance. Saddam knows that, which is why the issue has always been in his hands. He can determine the matter, if he is prepared to come into line with the UN resolutions in their entirety. On the humanitarian side, what is important is that we continue to do whatever we can and, at every single stage, counter the lying Iraqi Government propaganda that babies are dying and people are being starved of food because the west will not allow supplies to come in. I think that I am right in saying that, of the aid for medicines, only 30 per cent. has gone anywhere near the people who should have received that medical assistance. The rest of it, and a large part of the money for the food programme, has gone to that small number of elite people around Saddam Hussein who are keeping the rest of the Iraqi people in repression.

Mr. John Major (Huntingdon): The Prime Minister is right to have supported the United States and the United Nations resolutions over the past few days, and I believe that he was right to commit British forces to take part in any punitive exercise that was necessary. He will also be right if he commits British forces in future without further warning, because that warning has now clearly and unequivocally been given.

Since 1991, Saddam has flagrantly broken every promise he has made. He is developing nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, biological weapons and a delivery system. Unless those weapons are removed, no one can have any confidence that the day will not come when he seeks to use them on neighbouring states, whether on Tel Aviv, Riyadh or elsewhere. We are aware that he has those weapons and it would unforgivable if we did not continue to take the action to ensure that he cannot use them in future.

The Prime Minister mentioned the enormously important contribution of the Arab states and he was right to do so. However, he knows that a different message often goes out from the mosques after prayers, week after week. Will he instruct the Foreign Secretary to do everything he can to repeat the message that our dispute is with the Iraqi regime, not with the Iraqi nation and certainly not with Arabs generally across the middle east? It is vital that we continue to retain the active and positive support of Arab nations.

This is Saddam's crisis and nobody else's. It will not be ended until those weapons are moved, one way or another. If the Prime Minister is forced to order further force, he may do so with a clear conscience. The responsibility lies in Baghdad, not in Washington or London.

The Prime Minister: I agree with everything the right hon. Gentleman says. I thank him for his support and assure him that we shall certainly act as he urges us to do in respect of the Arab states. Their statement last week was an important development, but we have to keep up the argument the entire time. I entirely agree that the dispute is with Saddam Hussein and not with the Iraqi people, nor with the rest of the Arab world. We have to carry on repeating that message all the time.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support, because on issues such as this it is important that there be cross-party support. One of the things that we have learnt from dealing with Saddam Hussein is that he looks carefully to see how much support there is and how much he can attempt to win by means of divide and rule. Therefore the greater support there is across the political divide here, the greater the impact on him and the greater our ability to avoid the use of force.

I also entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman about weapons. As I said a few moments ago, one of two things will happen: either the inspectors will do their work and complete it, or we shall take action ourselves to diminish the weapons of mass destruction capability.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his steadfast resolution and that of our US allies, which has prevented, for this time, further defiance of the world community by Saddam Hussein? However, as my right hon. Friend will realise, in the US over the weekend there has been a subtle change of policy, which is to heighten the policy objective of toppling the regime in Baghdad. Would he care, first, to spell out whether that is fully agreed to by the Government; and secondly, to state what it means in practice? Does it mean, for example, arming or financing opposition groups? Is he aware that the most credible of those opposition groups have already rejected such assistance?

The Prime Minister: As I said a moment ago, we have to consider with the US the support that we can give the opposition to the Iraqi regime, and that is a legitimate aim for us. If it is the case—and no one can seriously doubt it—that Saddam Hussein does not act in good faith and unless prevented will unquestionably pose a threat to his neighbours—let alone the repression that he visits on his own country—it is an entirely sensible policy objective for us to do all that we can to support opposition to him. We must simply seek the most sensible way of achieving that. That is by no means inconsistent with, and indeed is complementary to, our other objectives.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): I warmly endorse the Prime Minister's praise for UNSCOM, but is he aware that since the Annan agreement, UNSCOM's work,

although successful, has been like drawing hen's teeth and it is thought that much of that work has been compromised? Will the Prime Minister tell the House what limits he will assign to obstruction by the regime in Baghdad to UNSCOM's work; and in the event of such obstruction, at what stage he will consider that action will be necessary to ensure that the work is made possible?

The Prime Minister: The important thing is that UNSCOM does its work without any let or hindrance, and the Iraqis have now agreed to that. We shall obviously consider carefully the reports made by UNSCOM to ensure that that condition is being kept. The hon. Gentleman is right—work has been largely compromised since February. If that starts to happen again, we will regard it as a breach of the undertakings that have been given; so we will make a judgment based on UNSCOM's reports, and we must monitor that situation extremely carefully.

If the Iraqis think that they are returning to the position that they were in between February and 30 October, when they withdrew all co-operation, they are wrong. We expect the inspectors to go back into Iraq and be able to complete the work that they were tasked with by the UN resolutions. Again, I stress that all we are demanding is that the resolutions made at the end of the Gulf war—from which these events derive—be implemented in full. We shall watch the work every inch of the way.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Prime Minister aware that although the world is united in its hostility to the regime of Saddam Hussein and its desire to have the United Nations resolutions carried out, there is no possibility—and the Prime Minister should admit it—of carrying through the Security Council a resolution authorising force against Saddam? He has not even attempted to do so. If an operation, once suspended, were launched now without further notice, the effect on the middle east, as the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) pointed out, would be absolutely catastrophic for the influence of the United States and Britain in that area.

If force were used to change the regime in Iraq, which President Clinton has hinted at and the Prime Minister has now confirmed, that would put us totally outside the realm of legitimacy in international law and the United Nations charter.

The Prime Minister: I can say two things to my right hon. Friend. First, we believe that the legal basis for action is secure because of the UN resolutions that have been passed and the need to enforce them.

Secondly, let us examine what has happened over the past few days. I cannot believe that anyone seriously thinks that the Iraqis, who two weeks ago had withdrawn all co-operation and effectively prevented UNSCOM from performing their duties, would have today allowed the inspectors back in unconditionally—they say—to do their work normally, without let or hindrance, except under duress and the threat of force. It is simply not credible that they would have altered their position unless they were threatened with military action.

I say to my right hon. Friend and those in the international community who are hesitant about the use of force that it is no good willing the ends unless we will the means. It is absolutely no good saying to the outside world that we want the UN resolutions on eliminating weapons of mass destruction to be carried through if we are at the same time saying that we will never contemplate the use of force to ensure that they are carried through. It is perfectly obvious from what has happened that if we took that position there would be no elimination of weapons of mass destruction and we might as well render those UN resolutions of no effect at all.

It simply cannot be overstated—we have learnt this on many occasions—that when we are dealing with a dictatorial, brutal and corrupt regime such as that of Saddam Hussein, diplomacy works only if it is backed up by the credible use of force.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the UNSCOM inspection teams, whose work is absolutely critical, will have the unambiguous and unqualified support of the American and British Governments, in particular, in inspecting both declared and undeclared sites?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can confirm that absolutely.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and President Clinton on facing down the procrastinations and tergiversations of murderers and torturers, and on demonstrating to those who toddle off periodically to Baghdad to get their skins tanned and their noses browned that only force or the threat of force has any effect on such people in their violation of a succession of Security Council resolutions.

My right hon. Friend has confirmed to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and others that existing Security Council resolutions specifically authorise the use the force—as they did when the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was Prime Minister. Although he has understandably dealt today with the consequences of the Iraqi attempts to fail to conform to the United Nations Security Council resolutions on weapons inspection, will my right hon. Friend confirm also that there is no prospect of sanctions being lifted until Iraq complies with not only the weapons resolutions but the whole range of UN resolutions?

The Prime Minister: It is essential that everything that the United Nations has set out should be implemented. I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend and welcome his support for ensuring that those Security Council resolutions are implemented in full. I emphasise that that must occur because Saddam Hussein has been trying to develop weapons of mass destruction.

I urge upon those who are doubtful of the need to threaten to use force that we are not talking about technical breaches of the agreements. Saddam Hussein was developing weapons of mass destruction before the Gulf war. He has continued to try to do so since then and to conceal it. If he were successful, the threat to the world would be enormous. He is the one who has used chemical weapons—and he used them against his own people. Some 5,000, mainly women and children, were killed as a result of chemical warfare.

[The Prime Minister]

It is essential that we keep in place the existing mechanisms and maintain eternal vigilance until the Security Council resolutions are complied with in full.

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I am put in mind of the relationship between another Prime Minister and another President who met twice a year—first she told him what she thought and then she told him what he thought. However, these are different times and different people. Can we be assured that Britain has an independent voice in this matter and not just an echo; and that there is at least a prospect of revisiting that grand coalition—not only in this country but in the United Nations, and especially in the Arab world and the Gulf states—that was put together when last we committed our armed forces to the Gulf, in 1990-91?

The Prime Minister: Yes. We have been active in building up as much support as possible. As we have said, the supportive statements made by European Union members and by the Arab states demonstrate the degree of backing for our position. The words of the United Nations Secretary-General yesterday are obviously very important also.

As for our having an independent voice, I believe that what we did was right—if I did not believe it was right, I would not have done it. While I believe that it is important that this country is—and always will be—the master of its own foreign and defence policies, I do not make any apologies for our relationship with the United States of America. As I have often said: thank goodness the United States is there and prepared to act in these situations, even if others are not. If we had not been prepared to act in this situation—I could mention many others who were not—the possibility of securing peace and stability in the world would have been much diminished.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend has revealed an horrendous list of weapons to the House today. Will he make it clear that, if a man who is unstable and who rules a regime as totally unacceptable as that in Iraq remains in control of savage weapons of war, no one will be safe until we can guarantee that they have been completely withdrawn and destroyed? Does he understand that it is essential that the inspectors work as rapidly as possible, and will he ensure that the period that Iraq is allowed is foreshortened? If those weapons are allowed to remain, no one will be safe.

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with the sentiments that my hon. Friend just expressed. It is important that the inspectors be able to gain access, not just to the declared sites, but to the undeclared sites—and to all the various documentation, because that too is important in uncovering the weapons programme. Of course, that is all part of the agreement that Saddam Hussein entered into at the end of the Gulf war. The agreement, negotiated by the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon, and by President Bush, was that Saddam Hussein would destroy all weapons of mass destruction; and the inspectors were put in there in order, as it were, to certify that he had carried out that programme. The truth is that they have had to carry out the programme and he has spent six or seven years trying to dodge it.

I totally understand the frustration of people who say, "This has all taken an awful lot of time." Yes, it has, but at each stage we are eliminating the weapons, ensuring that the inspectors can go back in and do their work, and building the basis for the use of force again if Saddam Hussein pulls back from the undertakings that he has given.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): May I express my appreciation to Prime Minister for coming to the House in person to make this important statement? He has put his credibility on the line, in as much as he has explained why he has taken our armed forces to the brink of war and not beyond, and we hope that the policy will be successful. He also mentioned the issue of conventional armaments. Does he envisage any extension of sanctions to prevent Saddam Hussein building up his conventional weaponry, which is already fearsome enough?

The Prime Minister spoke of our allies—the United States and President Clinton—in glowing terms, but there were some notable absentees in this matter. What about our European friends? At Vienna, he was eulogising the common foreign and security policy; what has become of it over this crisis?

The Prime Minister: I thought for a moment that we were going to get through a question by the hon. Gentleman without a knock at Europe. In fact, the European Union—as it said in a statement last week and, I understand, as it is saying today—will be very helpful to, and supportive of, what we do.

The sanctions regime is tied to a series of things that must be done by Saddam Hussein. If we carry out all the things that are in the various UN resolutions, we shall have secured the objectives that we have set ourselves in respect of armaments, and I believe that we shall do so. Those resolutions amply justify the action that we are taking.

Of course our credibility is on the line here; it always is in these situations, but I think that we are right to say that we shall not hesitate to act if Saddam Hussein goes back on the undertakings that he has given.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): I am for rooting out these hideous weapons wherever they are, whether they are the ocean of chemical weapons that the United States of America dropped on the people of Vietnam, or the biological weapons in the Israeli arsenal, some of which we read about at the weekend, which strike a new low even in that dreadful alchemy.

In 1956, a less distinguished predecessor of my right hon. Friend stood at that Dispatch Box and asked who would chain

"the mad dog of Cairo".

It was a precursor to a devastating Anglo-Israeli attack on Egypt, with cataclysmic results; this time we were minutes away from an equally cataclysmic mistake. Does the Prime Minister really think that the kings and sheikhs at Doha were speaking for the Arab people—speaking for the Muslims of the world? I hope that he does not; I hope that he knows better than that.

Will the Prime Minister answer one question? Why is it that Israel, which illegally occupies three Arab countries, is allowed to have nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, but no Arab Muslim country is allowed to have the same thing?

The Prime Minister: In trying to compare Israel to Iraq, my hon. Friend simply underlines the misguided nature of his own arguments. Quite apart from the fact that Israel is a democracy, we cannot see Saddam Hussein in the same light at all. At the beginning of his remarks, my hon. Friend said that he was in favour of making sure that the weapons of mass destruction were destroyed. That cannot be done unless there is the threat of force to back up the diplomatic efforts.

As for speaking for the Arab people, I believe that those to whom my hon. Friend referred were speaking for the Arab people, but I agree that there is a large measure of disagreement in the Arab world—all the more reason for us to be out there saying with one voice, "This is not a quarrel with the Arab people. It is not a quarrel with the Iraqi people. It is a quarrel with Saddam Hussein." After all, the biggest single immediate threat that Saddam Hussein poses is to the Arab nations of the world.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I support the Government and the Prime Minister's action in coming to the House to make a statement. The Prime Minister will need no reminding of the complications and difficulties that can arise from the use of limited force in response to unlimited tyranny. Can he assure us that he was operating with the authority of all his colleagues, that the matter was given careful consideration and that the defence and overseas policy committee of the Cabinet had met prior to the decisions that he took on Saturday?

The Prime Minister: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we were acting with the full authority of the Government, as he would expect. The action that we worked out was proportionate and right. It would have achieved the objectives that we had set for any military action—first, by degrading the capability of making weapons of mass destruction, and secondly, by diminishing the threat that Saddam Hussein posed to his immediate neighbours. Both those objectives would have been satisfied by the military action, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that was the united position of the entire Government.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who, 42 years ago, vigorously demonstrated against the British, French and Israeli aggression, believe that we are perfectly justified in campaigning against the Iraqi dictator at every opportunity? Is it not the case that since 1990, the division in the House has been between those who want to face up to the criminal nature of the regime and those who want to appease Saddam Hussein? Those who now criticise my right hon. Friend and the American Administration for what they have done are the very people who in 1990 and 1991 justified the invasion of Kuwait. Had we listened to such people, no action would have been taken to liberate Kuwait. We were right then, and we are certainly right now.

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Prime Minister is right when he says that the patterns of behaviour demonstrated by Saddam Hussein amount to continued deceit. The Prime Minister is also right to consider the use of force and to maintain that threat, but what will happen if Saddam Hussein again agrees with Kofi Annan, accepts the United Nations proposals and six months later changes his mind? How long will we keep troops on station? How long is the United States prepared to keep two aircraft carrier groups in the region? Once they withdraw, is it not possible, as the Prime Minister admitted, that Saddam Hussein might change his mind again? What will happen if, in the time that it takes to bring our troops back, Saddam Hussein again concedes to the UN demands?

The Prime Minister: There is a simple answer: we will remain ready to act whenever Saddam Hussein withdraws his co-operation. Although it is easy to say, it is not a correct description of the situation to state that we are in the same position as we were back in February. The substantial differences are, first, in February, there was a long build-up to the memorandum of understanding; it has been two weeks since Saddam Hussein's decision of 30 October to withdraw co-operation. I do not believe that anyone doubts that we will move straight away next time. It is important for us to be able to say to the entire outside world, "This is not action that we take willingly. It is not action that we want to take, but it is action that we feel obliged to take, having exhausted all other avenues."

Secondly, Saddam Hussein now knows that we are deadly serious. He knows that the planes were very nearly ready to mount the strike before he made his offer and climbed down. He has to realise, and I believe that he does, that next time there will be no time for that at all.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I agree with my right hon. Friend that this is far from over—but will it ever be over until such time as there is the prospect of sanctions being lifted? Does my right hon. Friend accept the glimmer of hope that was given by Kofi Annan, that part of a package would be that at last, after seven years, there would be the prospect of sanctions being lifted?

Secondly, last Sunday Albert Reynolds and I sat in the office of Jaakko Ylitalo, who is the acting director of UNSCOM. He said that UNSCOM had visited 496 sites and that there had been no violation in any of those sites. Furthermore, he talked in terms of a three-month time limit. Could a full look be given at this very complex area of precisely what UNSCOM has found and what it hoped to find?

Finally, to use the felicitous phrase of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), might it not be so bad an idea if a delegation of preferably Arabic-speaking people—senior officials—went to Baghdad not to get their noses brown but to talk in terms of dignity to the proud northern Arabs whom, let us never forget, we were content to provide with arms throughout the 1980s, when we hoped that they would not be defeated by the Ayatollah and militant Islam? This is a very complicated area. Please send some kind of delegation to talk to them before we think of hurling down missiles.

The Prime Minister: I respect the fact that my hon. Friend has different views on these matters. First, I say to him that we have made the position very, very clear to the Iraqis again and again. They know what they have to

[The Prime Minister]

do to get sanctions lifted. They have to do what they agreed to do at the end of the Gulf war. The fact that sanctions are still in place is a measure not of our obduracy but of the fact that they have not implemented what they agreed to do at the end of the Gulf war.

As for UNSCOM, it is there to do a job of work that it knows is not yet complete. There is no doubt at all that there are still weapons unaccounted for. I listed in my statement—I did so deliberately—the vast arsenal of weapons that has been uncovered.

No matter how much we would wish for Saddam Hussein to be a different type of person from what he is, the fact is that he is a brutal dictator who has used chemical weapons against his own people. He has repressed and murdered thousands of his own people. The country is run by an elite guard of people who are well fed, well looked after and well paid while the rest of the population is under repression. When people oppose him, this is a man who seeks a way to murder them. He is not a man in whom we can have any belief that he will do the right thing, except under duress.

As for the Iraqi people, we constantly make the point, as do Arab countries, that the quarrel is not with them. However, we must not be naive about this. There is no way Saddam Hussein will offer us any way forward unless he knows that if he does not do what he has agreed to do force will follow. I am afraid that that is the inescapable conclusion of the past few years.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I commend the Prime Minister's statement that there is no point in wishing the end without willing the means, but has he noted the criticism of some Gulf war veterans that the allies' war aims are somewhat confused? What are the Prime Minister's aims? Are they to remove Saddam? No tyrant has ever been removed by aerial bombing alone. Or are they to destroy chemical and biological stocks? As those are easily dispersed, they cannot be destroyed by aerial bombing alone. Is the Prime Minister therefore willing to contemplate military action on the ground?

The Prime Minister: We have set out our position with great clarity: we want UNSCOM to do its work because that is what Saddam Hussein agreed. If he refuses to let UNSCOM do its work, we shall take military action, the purpose of which is twofold: first, to degrade the weapons of mass destruction capability; and secondly, to diminish Saddam's general military capability to threaten his neighbours. Those objectives are plainly set out.

We believe that, in the action that we were about to take, we could have delivered both those objectives. They remain our objectives, so there is no confusion at all. However, we should never promise that we can achieve something unless we are sure that we can achieve it. We are sure that we can achieve the objectives that we set out.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Defence Secretary on the resolute way in which they have gone about this matter over the past couple of weeks. May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the Foreign Secretary's comments last week in the House, when he conceded that illicit revenues secured in breach of United Nations sanctions—from oil supplies from Iraq to Iran through the straits to the south and through Kurdistan in the north—are funding Saddam Hussein's whole operation in Baghdad, particularly the Republican Guard? Why will not the United Nations carry a resolution to enforce a blockade effectively to cut off those oil revenues? When the money is cut off, Saddam Hussein will fall.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Together with our allies and friends, we are looking at how we can tighten the regime. He is right to say that there has been seepage from the sanctions regime. Any seepage undermines the efficacy of the sanctions. We hope that we can take steps to tighten that regime.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The Prime Minister has paid generous praise to the United States of America for the enormous effort that it makes to carry out United Nations resolutions. The House knows that this country has often sided with the US in carrying out those resolutions. Although we may not contribute much by way of munitions, it is important psychologically that the world sees that the United States does not stand alone, but has an ally in discharging those obligations.

Should we be rash enough to join a common European foreign and defence policy, it would be practically impossible for us to be an ally to the United States when it tries to carry out such difficult operations. Is it fully appreciated in Washington that, if we were propelled into a common European foreign and defence policy, we would no longer be in the present happy position of reinforcing the US President when he takes such action?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his initial statement. On the second point, however, he is just wrong. I am aware of no discussion of any sort in Europe that would either compel us to join some defence policy that would undermine our alliance with the United States or inhibit our ability to act with the United States where necessary.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that the European security and defence identity within NATO was set up a couple of years ago, quite rightly, to recognise the European dimension. That does not mean to say that we have to act in contradistinction to, or contradiction with, the work that we do with the United States. However, it is important that Europe should have a more effective foreign and security policy. Our bottom line is to achieve that in the right way, which in no way undermines or inhibits our relationship with the US and NATO.

I think that the hon. Gentleman will find, as so often, that, once we strip away the paranoia—if I may describe it as that—of those who are opposed to anything with the word "Europe" in its title, we will see that the United States would welcome a stronger voice from Europe on many occasions. If Britain is sensible, we can use our relationship with the United States—and if we are positive and constructive in Europe, we can use our relationship with the rest of Europe—to make sure that the EU and the United States follow the same strategy. That would be to the benefit of the whole world.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Last week, an all-party delegation visited the United Nations and met members of the Security Council. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the high regard in which the Government are held in the UN? Much credit should be given to Sir Jeremy Greenstock, our ambassador, and his team there.

Would my right hon. Friend remind Members of the House and others who are timorous about doing what is right that eight Arab states last week laid the blame entirely at the door of Saddam Hussein? Will he reiterate his view that, if Saddam Hussein back-tracks by one degree, no more talking will take place, but force will be used?

The Prime Minister: That is absolutely right, and I thank my hon. Friend for her support. She is right to draw attention to the work that Jeremy Greenstock did in the United Nations over the weekend. He and the team there were quite magnificent and played a great part in securing the result that we wanted.

Agriculture (Aid)

4.31 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): From swords to ploughshares.

During oral questions on 12 November, I told the House that I would wish to make a statement early this week about the Government's intentions on additional aid to United Kingdom agriculture. I stand here to honour that undertaking.

Since I took office as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in July, my colleagues and I have had wide-ranging discussions with farmers' leaders and with working farmers around the country about the problems being faced this year, and how we might reasonably address them. It has become clear that all sectors, but particularly the livestock sector, have been adversely affected by a marked deterioration in market conditions.

The weather has made it difficult to grow adequate supplies of feed for the coming winter and to finish stock. In consequence, animals have had to be kept for longer than usual, and are now coming on to an over-supplied market. The collapse of export markets in Asia and in Russia has exacerbated that situation, leading to further pressures on the United Kingdom market from supplies from countries which would otherwise export to those markets.

Within the constraints imposed by the common agricultural policy, the Government have already taken many steps to offer extra support to farmers. We paid £85 million in agrimonetary compensation to suckler cow and sheep producers at the beginning of this year. We supported the introduction of a European Union private storage aid scheme for pigmeat in the face of a fall of about 50 per cent. in the producer price of pigs. Additional action was taken in Northern Ireland.

We have relaxed the rules on the moisture content of cereals eligible for purchase into intervention, in recognition of the difficulties caused to cereals producers by the wet summer. We successfully lobbied the European Commission to grant two blocks of private storage aid for sheepmeat to help to move lamb on the market. With effect from 8 October, we removed the obstacles to the export of whole sheep carcases to France, and on beef we have successfully negotiated the introduction of the export certified herds scheme in Northern Ireland, and soon expect a partial lifting of the ban for Great Britain.

In addition, we have persuaded the European Commission and other member states to increase beef premium advances from 60 per cent. to 80 per cent. for this year, thereby considerably easing farmers' cash flow problems. We have met the costs for one year of Meat Hygiene Service enforcement of controls on specified risk material from cattle and sheep, and we have met the start-up and first-year running costs of the new cattle tracing system.

I have had useful talks with the retailing sector, resulting in positive undertakings on origin labelling of meat, and on the welfare and feeding standards to apply to purchases of meat, which will be particularly helpful to pig producers. I have also made representations to public sector purchasers of meat.

Not all those initiatives cost money, but those that do have been worth, in total, more than £150 million to the industry, in addition to the continuing support that it

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receives from the common agricultural policy. Discussions with industry representatives, at both ministerial and official level, have persuaded the Government that more should be done to support United Kingdom agriculture in what are proving to be exceptionally difficult times. In recognition of these extremely difficult circumstances, the Chancellor and Chief Secretary have, exceptionally, allowed me access to the reserve for this financial year, and I am grateful to them for that.

In spring of this year, the Government drew down £85 million of agrimonetary compensation for the beef and sheep sectors. There remains the possibility of drawing on a further £48.3 million for the beef sector in the current year. I have asked officials to notify the European Commission today of the Government's intention to draw this sum, and to make it available to producers on the same basis as the beef element of the spring package—that is, to suckler cow producers in proportion to their 1996 premium claims. I do not anticipate any difficulty in persuading the Commission to approve that arrangement. We expect the eventual rate of payment to be about £29.50 per head.

Although those additional payments to the suckler cow sector will be of some help to hill farmers, the Government recognise that more needs to be done to help that fragile sector. We have decided that, subject to approval from the European Commission, we should increase hill livestock compensatory allowances for the 1999 scheme year by £60 million. Although precise headage rates have still to be worked out, we estimate that, broadly speaking, that will allow us to put up rates across the board by about 55 per cent. As is normally the case, the vast majority of producers will receive the increased rates of allowances during February and March 1999.

In the longer term, the European Commission has proposed replacement of the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme as part of a range of measures in the Agenda 2000 package to assist the rural economy. I intend to undertake full consultation with farmers' leaders and environmental groups on the shape of the successor arrangements.

On 29 July, I announced the Government's intention to close the calf processing aid scheme when the obligation to run it lapses on 30 November. We considered that the scheme was drawing too many calves from the market and squeezing beef producers' margins. However, the Government were asked to reconsider this matter by farmers, who argued that, in the absence of an export market for British beef, closing the scheme now could have adverse consequences for the market.

We therefore encouraged the Commission to review the rate of aid payable under the scheme, and to fix it at a level that would attract the poorer-quality calves from the dairy herd, while leaving the better-quality calves from that herd and those calves from the beef herd to find their own price level on the market. I am pleased to tell the House that the Commission broadly accepted our arguments in this regard, and will shortly publish a regulation fixing a special rate of aid for the United Kingdom under this scheme of 80 ecu, which is around 70 per cent. of the current rate.

The new rate will come into force on the first Monday following publication of the regulation, which will be either 30 November or 7 December. In view of that, we have decided to continue to operate the scheme for the remainder of the present financial year at the new rate. We shall keep the scheme under review with the industry. I know that maintenance of the scheme will be welcomed by dairy farmers.

This aid package for the livestock sector is worth some £120 million in 1999. In assembling it, the Government have concentrated on those areas to which farmers and their leaders attached the greatest priority.

We also need to think of the longer-term future. Government and all associated with food production in the United Kingdom need to work co-operatively to develop a blueprint for a successful, viable agriculture sector. That means, in particular, securing reform of the common agriculture policy—reform that must create conditions to allow sustainable and competitive European Union agriculture to operate effectively on world markets, reduce the burden currently imposed by the CAP on consumers and taxpayers, and free up resources to offer scope for better-targeted measures to support the rural economy and enhance the environment. That will mean significant changes in the way in which we support agriculture, and will require imagination, flexibility and enterprise on the part of all concerned.

My colleagues and I intend to undertake—in close consultation with all interested parties—a thorough review of the Government's long-term strategy for the rural economy. It will develop policies offering the rural areas a secure future. Over coming months, we shall consult widely on a range of issues. Trading conditions will remain tough in the months ahead, but I hope that this package, and the commitment to generating a vision for agriculture, will give the sector the boost that it needs to face the future with confidence.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): The whole House, and the whole farming community, will warmly welcome the Government's recognition that a grave crisis faces agriculture in general and livestock farmers in particular—a crisis that threatens the survival of many farm businesses. I welcome the Minister's statement, and congratulate him on listening to farming organisations, to many individual farmers, and, indeed, to the Opposition. In a motion that we tabled two weeks ago, we specifically highlighted three measures that he has announced in regard to the calf processing scheme, HLCAs and agrimonetary compensation. I am delighted that he was able to use the intervening period to secure the Treasury's support for those proposals.

We would, however, be failing farmers, and the country as a whole, if we did not point out that, although the measures are necessary palliatives, they will treat the symptoms rather than the causes.

Does the Minister agree that this second farm rescue package in a year is needed because the downturn in farm incomes, like the downturn in the whole economy, was made in Downing street? Does he agree that the level of the pound during the last 18 months has been a far more important cause of falling farm incomes than the weather? Will he confirm that the total value of the package barely matches the underspend on the agriculture budget during the past two years? In other words, the money that he won

from the Treasury this weekend is really just what had been saved from the total farm budget since Labour came to office. It is welcome, but it must be seen in the context of a drop of more than £2 billion in farm incomes.

Will the Minister confirm that the package will actually be worth less than £2,000 to each of the 60,000 United Kingdom farms that are in less-favoured areas? Will he confirm that, in England, the National Farmers Union estimates that the income of the average farm in a less-favoured area has fallen by £4,700 in this year alone? Will he confirm that many who work on farms in less-favoured areas are earning less than the minimum wage? According to figures relating to the west country, those earnings can be under £1 an hour. Does the Minister realise that farmers need not just cash help, but the level playing field that the Conservative fair deal for farmers would create?

The Minister will be aware of the concern among pig farmers about the contradictions caused by recent conflicting statements from his Ministry and the British Retail Consortium. I fear that his announcement today has added to the confusion rather than ended it. Will he tell us precisely what the positive undertakings he mentioned amount to? For how much longer will British consumers be sold imported meat products that have been produced by methods that are illegal in this country? Why cannot that be stopped now?

Is the Minister saying that, in future, any product that is labelled as British will be grown in Britain, not merely processed here? Does he agree that the poultry industry is also suffering? What does he propose to do to stem the flow of imported poultry from the far east, some of it containing growth promoters that have been banned for years by the European Union? Does he realise that little in his statement clears up the anxieties felt by dairy farmers? Why has he still not announced a lifting of the absurd and unjustified ban on beef on the bone? We wish him well at next week's Council meeting—[*Laughter.*] Yes, we do. It may be a matter of mirth to Labour Members, but we believe that the country's interests will be served if the Minister can persuade his EU colleagues to lift the export ban.

In that context, will the Minister confirm that, at best, the lifting of the ban will be only partial, and that the export of beef on the bone will continue to be banned? Will he confirm that, in the light of the experience of Northern Ireland, the recovery of our export markets will take some time? As Northern Ireland was helped with export promotion, will he make similar help available to the rest of the United Kingdom?

Does the Minister agree that the heavy burden of regulation on slaughterhouses, for which the industry itself is increasingly having to pay, will lower livestock prices in the future? Is he satisfied that British farms and slaughterhouses are not operating at a disadvantage relative to their European counterparts? Does his statement mean that, from September next year, farmers will be charged for the new cattle tracing scheme? If so, how much will they have to pay?

The package is a helpful aid to the survival of farmers in the short term; but farmers still face huge uncertainties, with Agenda 2000 discussions looming. When will the Minister make the Government's position clear on Agenda 2000, and explain to farmers just what role the Government envisage for them in the future?

Mr. Brown: I thank the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) for wishing me well. I hate to think what he would sound like if I had fallen out with him.

I said that I wanted to involve farmers' leaders in continuing discussions with the Government as the Agenda 2000 package develops. Indeed, we shall have detailed negotiations on that at next week's meeting of the Council of Ministers.

The Government paid for the setting-up costs of the cattle tracing scheme, and relieved the industry of the first year of charges. I shall want to discuss the matter further with the industry, but there will come a time when the charges will have to be transferred to it.

As someone who eats and enjoys eating meat, I am keen for slaughterhouses to be regulated. Regulation is essential to ensuring the safety of the food that is sold.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the beef ban. I have high hopes that we shall be able to secure the implementation of the Commission's proposal for a date-based exports scheme at the meeting of the Council of Ministers on Monday and Tuesday next week. The hon. Gentleman and I share an objective in this regard. As the House will recall, it was the policy of the Conservative party to bring about the lifting of the ban by November; I hope that I shall get it lifted by November—although, admittedly, it will not be the same November. The House will notice another essential difference, in that I am likely to achieve the objective.

My statement contained a good deal for the dairy industry. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the poultry industry. I met representatives of the industry this morning, and they put to me a number of points that I considered entirely reasonable. I shall think very hard about what I can do. The hon. Gentleman was right to put the issue in the context of my initial meeting with the British Retail Consortium, but I intend to meet its representatives again. I am trying to establish a continuing dialogue with retailers, producers and others who work in the food industry, so that we can work co-operatively, rather than the whole industry being characterised by a series of adversarial stances.

I thought that the hon. Gentleman's welcome for my statement was heartfelt, and I am sorry that the rest of his contribution fell away a bit. I noted, however, that he was asking for more money, and I hope that he has cleared that with the shadow Chancellor.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Can I make just one point?

The hon. Member for South Suffolk constantly refers to annually managed expenditure, and confuses it with an underspend or a drawdown from the reserve. If an estimate of demand-led expenditure is not reached, that does not allow the Department to take the rest of the money and spend it on something else. A fair-minded House will realise that I did rather better in my relationships with the real Chancellor of the Exchequer than the hon. Gentleman has done in his with the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): As the owner of a farming business that is determined to do

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everything possible to keep five men employed—perhaps I should declare an interest—may I express my personal thanks, and, I think, the thanks of farmers throughout the United Kingdom, for a package that demonstrates the Labour Government's powerful commitment to rural Britain?

On a separate point, will my right hon. Friend comment on the huge discrepancies between farmgate prices and the prices that are charged by many supermarkets for many commodities? Can anything further be done about the problem?

Mr. Brown: I am always happy to hear of a pleased farmer. In fact, after today's announcement, I think that I will even be able to find one or two outside the ranks of the parliamentary Labour party. Nevertheless, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for and welcome to today's announcement.

The Office of Fair Trading is taking a hard look at the discrepancy between farmgate prices and prices in the supermarkets. While I want to keep the different bits of the food sector in continuing dialogue, I am also taking an intelligent interest, as I know many others are, in the OFT investigation, and I look forward to receiving its eventual report.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I welcome the statement and the package of measures contained therein, which will find a broad echo among all rural constituents in all parts of the UK. Does the Minister agree that there is a salutary nature to it, in that it is the second package of relief measures that the Government have been obliged to introduce within the space of 12 calendar months? That in itself vindicates the campaigning that farmers have been undertaking, as well as the parliamentary support, to be fair, in all quarters of the House that has been expressed consistently over that period.

Without being churlish, I think that many hon. Members will reflect on the fact that, not under the current Minister's tenure, but under his predecessor's, if there had been more willingness to try to access a greater extent of the EU compensatory funds earlier, many of those we represent would not be in the depth of difficulty to which they have sunk throughout this calendar year.

As the Minister says, it is inevitably a series of short-term measures. May I therefore direct him beyond the statement—there is no great disagreement about those short-term measures; that is self-evident—to three specific things that he may wish to consider for the future? The first is calling in the chairmen of major high street banks to underscore to them the Government's continuing commitment to agriculture and the need for them to show continuing commitment to farmers who are their customers. That would do a lot to offer stability at community level.

Secondly, on marketing, not least given the Northern Ireland experience since the beef ban was lifted—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] Well, perhaps they are out marketing their products. Will the Minister acknowledge that the Northern Ireland experience underscores the need for an aggressive and high-profile marketing drive, both in this country and, more important, in the export markets to which we hope to regain access? Will he do more about that?

Thirdly, will the Minister give even greater emphasis to labelling? There is no doubt that, if there is one silver lining to the overlying cloud that agriculture has been under, it is the fact that at least the British consumer is now more alert to, conscious of, and indeed patriotic about, content, but that that content has to be clearly indicated, particularly with European import products? Will he give further emphasis to that as well?

Mr. Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome to the package. I am in discussions with the British Retail Consortium over labelling schemes, with the Meat and Livestock Commission over marketing schemes and I am due to see representatives of the high street banks shortly to discuss the finance of agricultural businesses.

The package was shaped by farmers themselves. When I went to their big rally at Blackpool, I said that I was going to listen, to learn and to help if I could. I listened very carefully to what they said, and I hope that the package meets, at least in part, the commitments that I gave them then.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcement deserves a warm welcome because of the benefit that it will bring to the industry at a time of massive crisis? Does he agree that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who speaks for the Opposition, might show a little more humility, not only because of the extent to which his Government compounded the effect of the BSE crisis on the industry, but because, last Wednesday, an article by the Leader of the Opposition in the *Daily Telegraph* made it clear that there is no way that a Conservative Government would have found the money for this package? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all the money in the package is new money for the benefit of the industry?

Mr. Brown: The bulk of the money is new money that has been given by the Chancellor from the reserve. Some of it is recoverable through the CAP and from the European Union, but even the share that is recoverable in respect of hill livestock compensatory allowances requires a further 71 per cent. contribution from the UK Exchequer, because of the Fontainebleau agreement that was negotiated in 1996. I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about the shape of the package, and thank him for his support.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): The Minister will obviously understand that there is great pleasure that today the Lord has given, but there is also concern that in future he may take away. I think particularly of the possible imposition of new charges for a meat hygiene service—specified risk material charges, cattle passports and the threat of a pesticides tax. I urge the Minister to keep all those matters under careful review at a time of great difficulty in the farming industry—difficulty that is likely to endure well beyond today's statement.

On a separate issue, who will lead the review of rural economy policy, an interesting footnote to the Minister's statement? Will it be him or his colleagues at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions?

Mr. Brown: On the last point, I am working with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on the

broader rural agenda, which properly is a matter for both our Departments. Of course, we will consult the territorial Departments as well.

As Chair of the Agriculture Select Committee, the hon. Gentleman is right to remind the House about charges. I intend to discuss those matters further with the industry, but I did say some time ago that there would come a time when charges were transferred from the public purse, which is carrying them at the moment, to the industry. It is clearly right that it should meet those costs in the longer term. Traceability, which underpins the larger of the charges, is here to stay. We would be complete fools to try to push that regime backwards, because it is a requirement of consumer confidence.

Ms Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his sensitivity to the special needs of hill farmers. It has never been easy to eke a living out of upland farming in my constituency, and today's package of measures will be especially welcome there; but will my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that, in looking to the long-term future of British agriculture, he will look for a sustainable and profitable framework for agriculture, especially for hill farmers in constituencies such as mine?

Mr. Brown: The whole purpose of today's announcement is to help hill farmers and others through times that I freely acknowledge are difficult for them. The purpose of helping them through is, of course, to ensure a long-term sustainable and profitable industry that they can take part in. I thank my hon. Friend for referring to my sensitivity. In my previous job, people did not make such references.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): The Minister is aware of the serious crisis that faces pig producers—the worst I can remember—particularly smaller producers, some of whom, if not quite a number, face bankruptcy. Will he therefore clear up the confusion in relation to his meeting with the British Retail Consortium? In relation to imported products from pigs, does that relate only to fresh products, or does it relate to processed products as well? If it is the former, what further action does he intend to take? Will he also say what success he is having in Government procurement schemes, particularly in the armed forces? Is there any prospect of food aid schemes—for example, to Russia—playing a part in the matter?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising the plight of pig farmers. I am extremely sympathetic to the pig industry. As hon. Members who follow the matter know, it has a largely liberal regime, with no great state aids. There are some export refunds and some aids for private storage, but that is about the size of direct state assistance.

There are discussions on opening credit lines to Russia. There may be a possibility of humanitarian aid, including food, being taken up in those discussions, which are on-going. I should welcome anything that would help to clear the surplus from the market.

My discussions with the British Retail Consortium were a genuine attempt by me to help the industry. The agreement applied to fresh meats that would be sold stall and tether-free, and from animals that are not being fed bonemeal—in other words, animals that are produced to the highest United Kingdom standards. The industry's intention was that that covers not only fresh meats but processed meats, including bacon and products such as pork pies. Supermarkets were willing to take responsibility only for those processed products over which they had direct control—in other words, their own brands. However, I am assured that those account for the majority of supermarkets' volume. We shall continue with the discussions.

On the other large procurers of meat products, I am happy to tell the House that the armed forces are 100 per cent. British in their purchase of pork, and just over 50 per cent. British in their purchase of bacon. They are considering ways of improving that.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that proof—if any were needed—that he has announced a very good package indeed was provided in the churlish welcome for it given by the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo)? May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his negotiating prowess with both the Treasury and the European Commission? May I also praise him for the very speedy way in which he has listened, learnt and now acted to deal with perhaps the worst crisis that I have known in my 20 years as the Member of Parliament for my Teesdale constituency? As hon. Members have already said, is not today's announcement proof of our Labour Government's commitment to the rural economy?

Mr. Brown: The Government are committed to the rural economy and to farmers. As proof of that, I am now willing to accept the invitation that my right hon. Friend extended to me on Thursday to go and meet his sheep farmers.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Although I welcome the Minister's remarks on the livestock sector, will he tell the House what he is hoping to do for the arable sector? He will be aware that many arable farmers are suffering severe problems, and that prices have collapsed for various crops and products. What will he do specifically for smaller arable farmers? When may we expect an announcement on their sector? When will he tell the House of his discussions with them?

Mr. Brown: I am not in a position to announce any new or further aids, certainly not to the arable sector. If the hon. Gentleman is asking me to draw down agrimonetary compensation that is available for the arable sector, and to charge 71 per cent. of that to the British taxpayer, he should say so clearly. I have taken action—admittedly it has been modest—to help the arable sector, but it has been proportionate. The crisis in the industry is in the livestock sector.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): As my right hon. Friend said, today's package will not financially help every farmer. However, in Norfolk, it will be broadly welcomed as a boost to the morale of almost every Norfolk farmer. My right hon. Friend has in a short time shown farmers that he has the leadership and other skills to tackle the tasks ahead. Will he be as determined as I believe he should be, and as determined as the farmers'

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union leadership is becoming, to ensure that the package will allow some time to get ahead with Agenda 2000, and not merely delay evil days?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I plan to embark on a continuing dialogue with those who have an interest in those matters, so that we can work together on the Agenda 2000 package and on the increasing liberalisation of world markets that will inevitably come. The United Kingdom must get ahead of the game, not run along behind it.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): The Minister has mentioned help for the upland farmers, and the farmers on Dartmoor in my constituency will be delighted to hear that. However, is he aware that, in the past few years, lowland farmers—who raise those famous Devon cattle—have borne the brunt of the problems? I am just wondering whether the Minister is planning to share with lowland farmers any of the money that he has announced for upland farmers. Will they get any help in their wonderful rearing of Devon beef?

Mr. Brown: I announced a range of measures—I did not concentrate only on less-favoured areas—and there is something in the package for the entire livestock industry. Moreover, it is a mistake to assume that one bit of the industry does not have a relationship with the other. Even the arable sector, for example, is growing food for the livestock sector. The relationships are far more complex than the hon. Gentleman's question implies. However, I am grateful for his welcome for today's announcement.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on coming up with a wholesome, desperately needed package. I specifically welcome the fact that he has managed to spread help across the board—to lowland farmers and to upland farmers, especially in the calf processing aid scheme. However, may I urge him to do everything he can to help smaller farmers—particularly tenant farmers, who are going through a very difficult time—by making it clear that it is wrong to increase rents now, and that rents should be decreased if at all possible?

Mr. Brown: I am very sympathetic to my hon. Friend's comments. Although it is often rash for Ministers to make forecasts from the Dispatch Box, I suspect that, over time, agricultural rents levels will decline as a feature of broader market liberalisation. I welcome his comments on small farmers, and can announce today that I plan to visit Cornwall in January, specifically to meet representatives of small farmers. I shall make that a priority of the visit. I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The Ministry has been honest enough to recognise that, when a farm suffers from the effects of bovine tuberculosis, compensation offered from the public purse covers only one pound in six of the farmer's true loss. Will the Minister clarify whether the package he has announced today will provide additional compensation to farmers in that very specific situation?

Mr. Brown: The package provides some extra support to the dairy sector. However, the way of dealing with bovine TB is to press ahead with current Government experiments to establish the science once and for all. We can then take action, based on the science, to prevent the spread of such disease.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, and tell him that it will be warmly welcomed by the farming community in my rural constituency? May I tell him also that small abattoirs in rural constituencies are suffering great hardship? Will he consider ways in which small abattoirs in rural constituencies might be helped to survive?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome for today's announcement. Since becoming Agriculture Minister, I have had to focus on some key problems—such as the immediate difficulties in the producer sector, and the need to work very hard on the politics of lifting the ban on our beef exports. Consequently, until now, I have not been able to give sufficient attention to some of the problems in the middle of the producer cycle—the bit between the producer and the retailer. I intend now to focus on those matters.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am sure that the beef and sheep sectors will be pleased with the Minister's announcement, but I just hope that it does not become an annual event—a sort of farmers' Christmas bonus.

Like other hon. Members, I should like to emphasise the fact that the pig and poultry sectors receive no aid from this package. I am pleased to hear that he met poultry producers today, but I note the confusion between fresh and processed pigmeat. Will the Minister give the House a categorical assurance that, in principle, he is against the import into this country of pig and poultrymeat that is produced to inferior welfare and hygiene standards? Failing that, will he encourage the retail sector to label those products to show that they come from countries with inferior welfare and hygiene standards?

Mr. Brown: We want a welfare premium for the British industry. As I said, I am very sympathetic to those sectors which work in a relatively liberalised market, especially the pig and poultry sectors. I have engaged retailers in discussions about labelling schemes. I think that, instead of urging me to do something on which I have already embarked, the hon. Gentleman should welcome the fact that I have made a start.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Like many hon. Members, I thank my right hon. Friend for, and congratulate him on, his significant announcement. I am quite sure that the present Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), in the short time that he has been in office, and the previous Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), will both have made significant contributions in putting the Welsh case.

Will the Minister tell us how much farmers in Wales are likely to get? Will he concentrate especially on market issues, as prices in Welsh markets are at absolute rock bottom, and there is a need to push the retail industry along so that farmers get a better deal?

Mr. Brown: My estimate is that the HLCA package alone might be worth just over £2,000 each to hill farmers in Wales. Clearly, the extent to which they will benefit from the other announcements that I have made today will depend on the mix of the herds. As my hon. Friend will know, I visited Cardiff recently with the previous Secretary of State for Wales to meet representatives of the industry. Those discussions, and the discussions with the present Secretary of State, informed the shape of the package that I have been able to announce today.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): I welcome the Minister's proposals, but, given that agriculture is 50 per cent. more important to the Scottish economy and to Scottish employment than it is to the United Kingdom as a whole, how has that been taken into account in those proposals? How does the total match the depth of the problems? If the problems continue, will the Minister be prepared to act again?

Mr. Brown: I think that the hon. Gentleman could afford to be a little more generous, because Scotland benefits disproportionately from the announcements, as those who follow these matters closely will realise.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I thank my right hon. Friend for this timely and excellent package. May I tell him bluntly what farmers in my constituency are saying about him—that he listens well, and that he is accessible and most courteous? However, will he state the total round sum that is coming to Wales? Does he acknowledge that there are special difficulties for sheepmeat and beef producers on the hilltops and hillsides of Wales? How does this timely package help the family farm which demands so much hard work but often makes so little profit?

Mr. Brown: I estimate that the announcement is worth just over £21 million to Wales alone. That is a significant package of extra moneys for Wales. I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about how that will be warmly welcomed by the farmers to whom he has spoken.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): As the Minister has been listening to farmers, he knows that they will be grateful for the package. What does he say to those farmers who believe that, had the Department—perhaps not the Minister himself—acted earlier, they could hav obtained £818 million in agrimonetary compensation? What does he say to those farmers who point out that the £120 million package is worth while, but that the rise in interest rates on their bank loans since the previous election is exactly £126 million?

Mr. Brown: The idea that there is a huge pile of agrimonetary compensation available for collection in Brussels if only there was the political will to go over and get it and dole it out to farmers is a complete myth. That is not how it works, as the right hon. Gentleman should know, because he was a member of the Government who introduced the Fontainebleau agreement which conditions how such payments are made.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the extra £120 million is essentially designed to meet the short-term crisis? In the mid to long term, is it not our aim to bring about reforms of the CAP which would lift the landscape and enhance the environment, and, more particularly, bring new investment, new jobs and a new future to the wider rural economy?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why there are two elements to today's announcement. First, I am responding to what farmers told me at the large Blackpool rally. They said, "We need help, Mr. Brown, and we need it now." This package is that help. It is specifically targeted to deal with immediate difficulties. Secondly, in the longer term, I want to engage the whole of the producer side of the industry in a sensible discussion about how we get from where we are to where we all realise we need to be. That means working together co-operatively and finding a way forward to deal with the challenges that are marching towards us at a very fast pace.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement, and appreciate that it offers a great deal of assistance. Essentially, these measures will assist in the short term, but what steps is his Department taking to tackle the important matter of bringing confidence back into the industry and restoring public confidence in it? I should be much obliged if the Minister could respond to that question.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. These measures are targeted on the immediate problems. Farmers asked for help now; this is that help. In the longer term, we have to work co-operatively to move away from a CAP structure based on production support payments. We need to move towards a structure in which payments are area-based, transparent and specific, and which sets the framework within which private sector businesses can work out how they are going to operate and generate a sufficient return on capital and sufficient earnings for those working in the industry to make it worth while. The Government stand ready to help with that.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, when dealing with difficult farmland such as that in the Pennines, we have to consider the environment and the landscape balance as well as agriculture, as in many cases agriculture will not be viable there? We do not want the Pennines to be full of wind farms, which seem to be the only commercially viable option for many farmers at the moment.

Mr. Brown: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. That is why I am working very hard to try to reshape the CAP so that payments are specific and transparent, and are linked to environmental measures such as protecting the very beautiful area to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): The Minister said, quite fairly, that this welcome package targets the immediate problems. He also said that, in the longer term, he wished to reform the CAP. However, in between, there is still the problem of the very strong pound. What signal is the Minister sending to the industry on how the Government will tackle that problem in the foreseeable future, as it will not go away? How are bank managers and others to

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

envisage a future for the industry if there are no clear signals from the Government as to how, in the medium term, they will deal with the strong pound and its impact on agriculture?

Mr. Brown: Some people have very short memories. I remember when, under the Conservative Government, interest rates were twice their current level and the value of the pound was falling, which reflects market confidence. The Government's macro-economic strategy is right. To underpin that, I should point out that long-term interest rates are at their lowest level for 30 years.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. There will be a genuine welcome for him in the hillsides of Wales, today and in the coming months.

In relation to the dairy sector, my right hon. Friend will know that there has been a substantial collapse in the price of milk, and that that has exacerbated other problems in the livestock sector. He has told the House that he wants to see further co-operation. May I suggest that he brings together the processors and producers of milk, so that he can bang some heads together? I have never known two parts of the same industry to be so greatly at loggerheads that they are depressing the price.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend's suggestion is incredibly tempting, but it would be premature to take it up while the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's inquiry continues.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Welcome though the Minister's statement will be, is not the underlying problem of the industry structural, and will not that problem be resolved only if he proves to be successful in CAP reform? Specifically, what does his statement do for the few surviving hop growers in East Sussex? More generally, does he accept that there is concern on the Conservative Benches for hard-pressed farmers and growers, and for consumers, as food in British supermarkets continues to be among the most expensive in the world?

Mr. Brown: We all look forward to the report of the OFT's investigation into supermarket pricing. As a student, I used to pick hops, so I know something about it from the labourer's point of view. Changes in the way in which beer is produced probably have more influence on the growing of hops than anything done by my Ministry. I stand ready to help where I properly can, but I will not distort markets so that people engage in economic activity that they would not otherwise undertake.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I welcome the package that my right hon. Friend has announced, which will bring £2,000 for each farmer in less-favoured areas. That is not as much as they have lost, but it is none the less a significant help. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a key issue over the next two or three years will be the rebuilding of the economies of south-east Asia and Russia so that they can take our food exports? There are food shortages in Russia, so will my right hon. Friend enthusiastically press the European Commission to help with packages of food aid in the coming months, both to help poverty in Russia, and to deal with surpluses from our own markets?

Mr. Brown: The reopening of credit lines so that some supply can enter Russia would be a sensible way forward on humanitarian aid for Russia. An enormous amount of food was being sold to Russia, and the Russians will be in for a very difficult time if we do not find some way in which to restore their markets. I welcome my hon. Friend's other points.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Any positive move by the Minister will be welcomed by farmers in my constituency as a step in the right direction and as an improvement on past rhetoric. Farmers have financial burdens and they are struggling to reduce their losses, but the frustrations of the bureaucracy that has built up around farming—once an activity that involved working out and about in the environment—are becoming worse.

The farming community is subject to almost draconian penalties for the slightest slip of a pen, but ministerial errors—not by current Ministers—that delay payments or cause disruptions seem not to carry any compensation. Will the Minister consider ways in which to reduce the paperwork burden for farmers, and the farmers' sense that penalties are out of proportion to any error?

Mr. Brown: I have asked my Ministry to conduct a review of the information we require from farmers, and of the way in which we require it. That has been done before, but I wanted to take another look in order to satisfy myself that the Ministry is going about information collection in the most rational way possible. That work will continue into December.

I have tried to be specific in what I have said to the farming community, rather than making generalised statements that everything will be all right in three years. I want to say clearly what the Government can provide, and what the public purse will pay for. My vision of the future is a framework within which people may make their own judgments in a free marketplace.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I join the general welcome for my right hon. Friend's statement, but will he focus on the second part of it, which announced a thorough-going review of our preparation for Agenda 2000 negotiations? Those preparations should go far beyond the producer side of the industry, as they must also encompass processing, transport, the regulatory environment and—critically—the retail environment, in order to give a total picture of the preparedness of our agricultural sectors for a competitive market.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend follows these matters closely, and I am grateful for his informed interest. He understands the significance of the second part of my announcement. It is vital to the United Kingdom industry that we engage in the discussions early, and not just around the Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals. I broadly support those proposals, but broader challenges are marching quickly towards the industry.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the Minister accept that the reason why he cannot pay more money to the farmers—to which they are entitled, given their extremely difficult situation over the past few years—is that the rules are dictated by the Maastricht criteria? The question of state aids must be carefully considered, as it seems hardly fair that German miners should receive £6 billion a year in subsidies while UK farmers are entitled only to the fairly minimal, if welcome, amount that he has announced?

Mr. Brown: The framework within which decisions must be made was entirely shaped for the UK by the previous Conservative Government. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman seems to find it so bewildering, but I have to operate within the rules. Fortunately for British farmers, I am able to conduct a sensible and rational discussion with the Commission, and to persuade it to help us. The previous Government could not do that.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I thank my right hon. Friend for listening and for helping. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Minister of State, the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), and the Parliamentary Secretary, the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who have both done a cracking job, particularly in receiving the message from Lancaster and Wyre. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that issues such as the development of producer co-operatives and the revitalisation of small market towns will play a large part in his discussions, so that we can market high-quality local British produce?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on all three points. Local marketing, the ability of local farmers to work co-operatively and the work of my hon. Friends in my ministerial team have all shaped today's announcement. I have not been alone in going out to listen to farmers as other members of the Government have done that too. I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for that work.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): On behalf of farmers in Congleton, I welcome the package of measures that the right hon. Gentleman has announced, and his acceptance that the measures are short-term aids, intended to bring a little stability to the industry. May I return, however, to the vexed question of the level playing field, and particularly highlight the import of meat and meat products from countries in which animals are not raised, transported or slaughtered under the same welfare and hygiene standards that apply in the United Kingdom?

Will the Minister undertake to try to win a complete ban on such products? Until then, will he ensure that the public purse bears the high costs of regulation in the UK, such as the meat hygiene regulations and the cattle tracing scheme? Will he ensure that those costs are not transferred to the private sector until a ban is in place?

Mr. Brown: I am invited to be a protectionist rather than a believer in free trade, and to spend public money rather than to save it, as the Opposition usually want me to do.

I agree with the hon. Lady on two things. First, I am grateful for her welcome for the announcement, even if that welcome was qualified. Secondly, she argued that the rules that British producers must obey should be obeyed by others, and I think that she is right. I intend to take a hard look at the matters she raised. However, in my experience, the allegation that the others are cheating while we are not is often made in general, while specific examples are harder to come by. If the hon. Lady knows of any examples of grotesque unfairness in trading, I invite her to pass them on to me, so that I may have them investigated at once.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I am sorry to disappoint some hon. Members who wished to speak, but we must move on to the next business.

Orders of the Day

Scotland Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

Lords amendments further considered.

Clause 62

PAYMENTS OUT OF THE FUND

Lords amendment: No. 88, in page 27, leave out line 33

5.30 pm

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 89 to 112, 180 to 183 and 291.

Mr. McLeish: The amendments deal with a range of matters concerning finance and the tax-varying power. The main areas covered are accounting arrangements for cross-border public authorities, the independence of the Auditor General for Scotland and financial arrangements for the Registers of Scotland. On the tax-varying powers, the group contains amendments that provide for the reimbursement of expenses involved in administration of the power and a revised definition of "Scottish taxpayer". The other amendments are technical.

The technical amendments ensure that references in the Bill to "enactment" include the Scotland Act itself. Amendments Nos. 88, 89, 99 and 101 cover that point. Amendments Nos. 88, 89 and 99 make consequential amendments to clauses 62, 63 and 66. Amendment No. 186, in an earlier group, provides that references to "enactment" include future enactments and subordinate legislation. Amendment No. 111 therefore removes a redundant provision in clause 75. Amendment No. 103 is partly consequential on the revised definition of "enactment". With amendment No. 96, it restructures and simplifies definitions in clause 66 about "Scottish legislation" and "other legislation".

Government amendments Nos. 90 to 93, 95 to 98, 100 to 102 and 104 are largely technical and designed to clarify the intention of the Bill. The main substantive point concerns cross-border public authorities, which may, by virtue of an order under clause 84, receive part of their income directly from the Scottish Consolidated Fund. In those cases, the Bill's current provisions could well mean dual accounting and dual auditing.

It may be sensible for such bodies to provide only one account with, if necessary, an apportionment to Scotland as well, of course, as the other parts of United Kingdom, and for that account to be audited only once by, for example, the Comptroller and Auditor General. Such an arrangement may suit the needs of both this Parliament and the Scottish Parliament, and could be put into place under clause 84. The effect of amendments Nos. 96, 97 and 98 is to make it clear that such agreed arrangements in relation to a cross-border public authority are not duplicated or superseded by the provision that the Parliament is required to make under clause 66.

The other amendments clarify the provisions on the Auditor General for Scotland and the competence of the Parliament to provide for the accountability of persons receiving sums derived from the Scottish Consolidated Fund, even where those sums are used for functions in relation to reserved matters.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): It seems a very long time since we started this Bill. We have finally got to the final day, and I imagine that a couple of bottles may be broken open this evening. I look forward to the Minister's invitation, given the extortionate salaries that exist under this Government.

The Minister briefly alluded to amendments Nos. 90 and 93, which remove the term "independent" from auditors other than the Auditor General for Scotland who may be asked to examine expenditure made by the Scottish Executive or other public bodies in Scotland. Does that mean that an audit could be conducted in-house and so not independently of the Scottish Executive? I hate to bring a discordant note to the final day of the Bill, but the accounting methods of some Labour councils in Scotland have left much to be desired. We want an assurance that this is not simply a way of allowing previously independent procedures to be done in-house.

Amendment No. 91 removes the words

"or by the Scottish Ministers",

when defining the functions of the Auditor General for Scotland in respect of investigating the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of spending by others paid out of the Consolidated Fund. In other words, those who are paid directly from it can be audited, but those who are paid from it via a Scottish Minister need not be. Why is such a watering down of the comprehensive range of powers available to the auditor necessary? This is a change from what was originally in the Bill. We have a right to ask why it is needed.

Will the Minister say more about amendments Nos. 106 to 108 on existing debt? Some parts of the Bill defy attempts to get to the bottom of the amendments. With the best will in the world, I require the Minister to make this clear so that we know what is intended.

It is a particular joy at the end of the Bill to be able to welcome amendments tabled by the Government. Amendments Nos. 109 and 110 on tax-varying powers fall into that category. We are delighted that the Government have accepted that there was a serious anomaly in the practical implementation of those powers. We welcome the U-turn because we welcome sinners who repent at any time, even on the final day of an 18-month marathon.

The amendments change the definition of what constitutes a day's residency in Scotland for tax purposes. In the original Bill, a person was deemed to be resident in Scotland for tax purposes if he was in Scotland at the beginning or end of the day. That would have resulted in an anomaly for someone who worked for a financial service company in Edinburgh and who lived there, but spent the week working in London, who got the plane to Heathrow on Monday morning, stayed in London during the week and flew back on Friday evening. Because he spent part of Monday and Friday in Scotland, he would have been deemed to have been in Scotland for four days of out of seven and so liable to pay tax. That was a ridiculous anomaly, and I am delighted that the Government decided to remove it.

There are still anomalies in the tax definitions. Some of the most pertinent are in clause 71 and concern definitions of principal home, place of residence and main place of residence that have not been used before in United Kingdom tax legislation. What discussions has the Scottish Office had with the Treasury on those definitions? For example, an employee of a Scottish company who has a house in Edinburgh, but is seconded to London for a year where he stays in a rented flat would be considered a Scottish taxpayer because he has a principal home in Edinburgh even though he performs no employment duties in Scotland for an entire year. What constitutes a place under this legislation? That is not contained in UK tax law. Does it include hotel rooms, company flats, train compartments, the cabs of heavy goods vehicles or oil rigs? We would welcome clarification.

I would like the Minister to clarify two other points. Under the national tax rules relating to UK residents, anyone resident in the United Kingdom for any part of the year is resident for the whole year and liable to UK tax on the full income, even if he leaves the UK to live abroad for part of the year. By concession, the tax yield is split and income arising after departure is not in practice subject to tax. It is not clear whether the split-year concession will apply to Scottish tax if a Scottish taxpayer moves to England part way through the year.

The Minister mentioned cross-border authorities but on cross-border commuters, will a person who is resident in England who works in Scotland every day and returns home at night be not liable to Scottish tax because he will not have spent any days in Scotland according to the new definition? His work mates who live in Scotland will be liable. If English residents work night shifts, they will be liable to Scottish tax because technically they will be present in Scotland every day. How will those and other anomalies be ironed out? With some of the other problems that we mentioned earlier, they introduce unnecessarily discordant notes into an improved and rewritten part of the Bill.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I know, as others do, that the Law Society has had discussions with the Scottish Office and its lawyers on the issue and range of definitions. May we have a brief assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Law Society is reasonably satisfied—I cannot say completely satisfied because no one is ever completely satisfied on these matters—with the answers that have been given, or can we anticipate that there will be great difficulty in the courts when the matters come to be tested, as undoubtedly they will?

Mr. McLeish: Let me first deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about discussions with the Law Society of Scotland. The Law Society has been involved in every step of very productive discussions and is satisfied with the progress that is being made. However, as I shall explain to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) in a moment, the discussions are on-going and the Law Society will continue to be involved. At present, the Law Society is satisfied and I can reassure my hon. Friend that any issues before the Confederation of British Industry, the Law Society and ourselves will continue to be discussed at every opportunity.

I now return to some of the main concerns that have been raised this evening. Amendments Nos. 90, 91, 92 and 93 concern the Auditor General for Scotland. Let me briefly explain their implications. Amendments Nos. 90 and 91 are consequential to amendments Nos. 95 and 92 respectively.

The amended subsection proposed in amendment No. 95 provides for the independence of persons appointed by the Auditor General for Scotland to undertake audits or value-for-money studies.

Amendment No. 92 is technical. It clarifies that the Parliament is able to legislate for the accounting and auditing arrangements of bodies receiving money indirectly from the Scottish Consolidated Fund. Such bodies might include non-departmental public bodies funded by a grant from the Scottish Ministers. This makes the words

"or by the Scottish Ministers"

in clause 66(2)(d) unnecessary. The Parliament should be able to make accounting and auditing provisions even if the bodies' functions include reserved matters.

That point is what the provision is intended to make clear. Clause 66 already makes it clear in relation to bodies such as the Scottish Ministers and the Lord Advocate, to whom sums are voted directly out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund, by requiring the Parliament to legislate for their accountability. Of course the Parliament can legislate to provide for the accountability of persons and bodies, whether or not they receive funds derived from the Scottish Consolidated Fund, where the funding of those persons and bodies is otherwise within the competence of the Parliament.

Amendment No. 93 clarifies that the Auditor General for Scotland will be an individual, natural person and cannot be a corporate body or even a group of individuals. While on its own, the amendment might seem to remove the requirement for the Auditor General to be independent, this very important requirement is now catered for in the new subsection (6) proposed in amendment No. 95. That should give the hon. Gentleman the reassurance that he requires about the absolute independence of the Auditor General.

Amendment No. 95 clarifies the independence of the Auditor General for Scotland and of persons appointed by him. The sole exception is that the new subsection (6A) of clause 66 would allow the Parliament to provide for the direction of the Auditor General in relation to the preparation of his own accounts. In other words, the Parliament could provide for the Auditor General's accounts to be prepared in a particular format and in a particular manner.

In all other respects, the Auditor General will be free from the direction and control of any Member either of the Parliament or of the Executive, and any persons appointed by him—for example, firms of accountants—will be similarly free of such direction or control when they are undertaking audit or value studies of the Executive or its subsidiary bodies.

The other points raised were in relation to amendments Nos. 105 to 108, which are also technical amendments. Their purpose is to allow provision to be made to ensure that the outstanding debt owed by the Registers of Scotland trading fund to the national loans fund is repaid after devolution when the Registers of Scotland becomes part of the Scottish Administration.

[Mr. McLeish]

For further clarification, the keeper of the Registers of Scotland is responsible for maintaining various registers, the main ones being the land register and register of sasines in which titles to land and other heritable property are registered. He exercises these functions through the Registers of Scotland Executive Agency which operates as a trading fund under the existing trading fund legislation. That legislation will cease to apply to the Registers of Scotland when it ceases to be a UK Government Department and becomes part of the Scottish Administration on devolution. This would leave the outstanding debt owed by the trading fund to the national loans fund somewhat in limbo.

The amendments will enable the Secretary of State to order that the existing debt which is deemed to be owed by the trading fund to the national loans fund should be treated as an advance from the Secretary of State to the Scottish Ministers. The amount is just over £5 million. The Scottish Ministers will have to continue to repay the debt on the existing terms and conditions; and the Secretary of State will pay the proceeds into the national loans fund. That will ensure that the outstanding debt can continue to be repaid to the fund. I am sure that that very simple clarification will suffice to answer the hon. Member for Woodspring.

Of course it will be for the Parliament to decide on the permanent financial regime for the Scottish Administration, including the Registers of Scotland, and the current review of the registers' operations will assist both them and the incoming Executive in doing so. In the transitional period, we want to ensure that the registers can continue to operate broadly as now.

5.45 pm

I now turn to the questions that the hon. Member for Woodspring asked about tax. Again, he was largely complimentary that the Government had clarified an important matter that was raised in the House previously. I also refer to a point that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow.

There have been good discussions with representatives of the Law Society of Scotland, the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland. Following debate in Committee in another place, my noble Friend Lord Sewel, the Minister for Agriculture, gave undertakings to look again at the drafting of clause 71, and a useful meeting with the representatives of the three bodies concerned took place on 21 October. Proposals for basing the definition of a Scottish taxpayer on the concept of residence were discussed. While there were a number of differing views around the table, there was recognition that applying the concept of residence in this context could give rise to some very serious anomalies, which had been raised previously in the House.

There was, however, also a general acceptance that most of the difficult cases that had been identified could be removed or substantially diminished if the Government were to amend the definition of a "day spent in Scotland", so as to remove the double counting which can arise under the current provision in clause 71(4)(a).

That provision says that a day spent in Scotland means any day in which a person is in Scotland at the beginning or end of the day. It was pointed out that, for example, a lorry driver who spent 92 non-consecutive nights in Scotland in his cab could qualify as a Scottish taxpayer because of the double counting. I am pleased to say that the Government have listened to those concerns and amendments Nos. 109 and 110 address precisely this issue. They will ensure that if a person is in Scotland at midnight, he will only clock up one day spent in Scotland. Therefore, assuming that a person spends the entire year in the UK, he would have to spend 183 nights in Scotland before qualifying as a Scottish taxpayer. The three organisations involved were content with the amendments on the basis that they substantially address their concerns about clause 71 and I hope that the House will agree.

In reply to the hon. Gentleman's final points, the Scottish Office is working very closely with the Inland Revenue and the Treasury on tax powers, which will continue until the infrastructure is in place. Any outstanding issues will not only be discussed by the Scottish Office, the Treasury and the Inland Revenue, but will involve the organisations referred to by the hon. Member for Woodspring and by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow. I hope that I have adequately responded to the concerns that have been expressed.

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to the Minister. On his final point, which is a matter of some concern, I raised three terms: principal home, place of residence and main place of residence. On-going discussions with the Treasury will have to be structured as any change in UK tax law in respect of those definitions will obviously have an impact on Scottish taxpayers for UK taxes. Is this one of the areas where the Government intend to have a concordat? Will there be a formal mechanism of discussion and if so when might we see it?

Mr. McLeish: The answer is, no, there will not be such a mechanism in respect of those issues. In the circumstances, I shall assure the hon. Gentleman first, that the discussions, both those between the Treasury, the Scottish Office and the Inland Revenue and those with the key organisations I have mentioned, are on-going; and, secondly, that I shall write to him and other Opposition leaders detailing the current state of play on the matters that have been raised. I am sure that the contents of that correspondence will reassure the House that everything possible is being done to ensure a smooth transition to the infrastructure required for the new tax-varying power.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): May I ask the Minister for further clarification on a few points? Amendments Nos. 90 and 93 relate to the audit of expenditure by the Scottish Executive. I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is an extremely important point of principle that the Auditor General and anyone carrying out an audit should not only be independent, but be seen to be independent. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), the Minister said that he considered that those matters were dealt with in amendment No. 95 and new subsection (6), but I do not think that they clarify the point. Therefore, I ask the Minister for an assurance that independence is assured for anyone who carries out an audit in those terms.

On amendment No. 106 and the question of who pays for the general register of sasines and the land register, is the Minister saying that it will certainly be the Scottish taxpayer who pays directly, rather than the matter being

paid for out of national taxation; or is the effect of his answer that they will still be paid for out of national taxation, but accounted for in a different way so that they appear to be taken account of in the Scottish block?

On amendments Nos. 109 and 110, it is good to see that the Government have taken account of some of the points that Conservative Members have insisted are anomalous since the beginning of the Bill's passage. Many matters have caused us to be concerned that, subsequent to the enactment of the legislation, the Parliament would be unable to operate because of the in-built anomalies. I hope that the Minister will pay tribute to the work done in another place, where the anomalies have been smoothed out. Many times when we raised such anomalies in this place, the Government ignored us. I hope that the Minister will commend the work of the other place, which has been extremely valuable, although I do not expect him to go so far as to say that he hopes that the other place will continue in its present form. If the work had not been done in the other place, the Bill would not work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I did not want to stop the hon. Lady while she was in full flow, but I should point out that we are discussing Lords amendments, not the Bill in its entirety.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I intend to make only a brief speech, dealing mainly with amendments Nos. 109 and 110. I welcome the amendments, because they clarify points raised in earlier debates. I was interested in the Minister's comments about a person having to be in Scotland for 183 days at midnight before qualifying for taxation. How are tax inspectors to police that provision? In addition, Deloitte and Touche has raised a point about split-year concessions, which are possible under United Kingdom tax law. How would that be applied to Scotland? The clarification provided by amendments Nos. 109 and 110 is welcome because the Bill contained major problems.

To re-emphasise what my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) said about audit, I am a little worried about the term "independent" being removed, because its presence would strengthen the power of an auditor. To remove it might well weaken the hand of the person doing the audit and strengthen that of the Executive. I am therefore a little wary of amendments Nos. 90 to 93, and I should like a little more reassurance from the Minister.

Mr. McLeish: On the last point, the hon. Gentleman has my total reassurance. As the note in my hand says—it is more generous than the official advice—the removal of the word "independent" is an illusion. Amendment No. 95 covers it entirely.

The members of the consultative steering group have been determined to build on the auditing procedures used in this House. Hon. Members will find that a combination of the legislation, which is tough, and the work of the steering group, which is putting flesh on the bones, satisfies them that the issues are being taken seriously. Independence means independence. I hope that that also covers the first point raised by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing). The amendments are technical, but the main principle behind them is not a technicality—independence must be guaranteed.

The adjustment in respect of the register is, in a sense, a technical one in terms of debt and the loan fund. The important point is that fees pay for the whole amount, so it does not fall as a burden either on the taxpayers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or on those of Scotland. That should clarify the hon. Lady's point.

The other issues raised relate to amendments Nos. 109 and 110. The amendments have clarified and helped to resolve a problem that was troubling many hon. Members, which is why the Government took it seriously. On the other hand, many of the comments made about taxation have been unnecessary—to describe them as distorted or exaggerated would be going too far. They have been taken care of in the discussions with the Inland Revenue, the Treasury and the expert organisations to which I referred. We do not foresee any problems arising, because we have a great body of UK tax legislation and the experts are working with the Scottish Office to ensure a smooth transition from the current position to the implementation of the tax-varying power, if the Parliament decides to use it after the elections on 6 May.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 89 to 112 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Clause 83

CROSS-BORDER PUBLIC AUTHORITIES: INITIAL STATUS

Lords amendment: No. 113, in page 39, line 32, leave out ("sections 106, 107 and 108") and insert ("section 106")

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 114 to 118.

Mr. McLeish: This is a group of technical amendments, which is designed to ensure that clauses 83 to 85 make appropriate provision for cross-border public authorities—that is, those authorities whose functions cross the reserved-devolved divide and which are designated by an Order in Council under clause 83.

The most important amendments are Nos. 114 and 118, which make it clear that the clause 84 power can modify the application of clauses 83(1) and 52(4), and amendment No. 116, which makes it clear that an order under clause 84 can confer new functions. The other amendments clarify the wording of the clauses or are consequential to other amendments.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I do not want to detain the House unduly, but I draw the Minister's attention to amendment No. 113, which he barely mentioned, because it gives rise to an interesting question. I have laboured manfully to understand the import of the amendment and consulted noble Lords who were active in the discussions in another place.

6 pm

First, how does the Minister interpret the difference in clause 83, to which amendment No. 113 refers, between a function

"which is specifically exercisable in relation to a cross-border public authority"

and a cross-border authority's function? That seems to be the distinction on which amendment No. 113 is relying when it excludes proposed sections 107 and 108 from the second part of clause 83, which relates to the function of such an authority as opposed to the specific exercise of a function in relation to a cross-border public authority. I ask because it is not certain that a court would be clear about the difference. It would be extremely helpful if the Minister could clarify that point.

Secondly, will the Minister cast more light on the connection between the amendments and the draft Cross-Border Public Authorities (Specification) Order, which was introduced in another place? In particular, will he clarify whether all the bodies specified in the order are cross-border in the normal use of that term? If so, how could they have functions to which clauses 107 and 108 ought not to apply, which would be the effect of amendment No. 113?

My final question relates to earlier questions about audit. Who will be responsible for the audit of those authorities and how will that relate to the effect of amendment No. 113, which removes under clause 83 the application of clause 107 to those bodies, given that clause 107 deals specifically with whether moneys paid to those authorities will come out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund?

Mr. McLeish: I should, perhaps, have dealt with those issues before, but, in the interests of brevity, I did not. I shall do so now.

Government amendment No. 113 is a consequential amendment. It removes a reference to proposed sections 107 and 108 in clause 83, which is made redundant by amendment No. 180 to clause 107.

Government amendments Nos. 114 and 118 make it clear that a clause 84 order can modify the application of clauses 83(1) and 52(4) in relation to any cross-border public authority. The bodies in the order referred to by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) are cross-border public authorities. That means, for example, that an Order in Council under clause 84 could apply clause 49 in relation to certain ministerial functions in relation to the authority so that those functions would transfer to Scottish Ministers.

Government amendment No. 115 simply makes it clear that an order made under clause 84 may make provision in respect of any particular function of an authority. At present, it could be read as enabling provision to be made only in respect of all the functions of an authority. That would be too restrictive. It is a technical amendment.

Government amendment No. 116 introduces a new paragraph in clause 84(2) to make it clear that an order under it can confer new functions. That might be used, for example, to give the Scottish Ministers a new function of determining the form of accounts of a cross-border public authority.

Government amendment No. 117 is a drafting amendment that simply deletes the redundant words "if any" from clause 84(2)(c). That subsection would then simply provide that an order under clause 84 would be able to modify the constitution of a cross-border public authority. One cannot amend the constitution of an authority that does not have one.

A draft of the order that would be made under clause 83 was placed in the Library on 29 July. Examples of bodies include the Forestry Commission, the Meat and Livestock Commission, the British Waterways Board and the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce.

It will be useful if I also put on record an explanation of the context of clause 83. The policy is that it should be for the Scottish Parliament to decide whether cross-border public authorities should continue to operate after devolution as they do at present. The Government envisage, however, that the Scottish Parliament will, generally speaking, wish existing arrangements to continue to operate to take advantage of sharing knowledge and expertise, and of the greater efficiency in the use of resources. The provisions of clauses 83 to 85 give effect to that policy.

Public bodies, Government Departments, office-holders or offices that meet the criteria set out in clause 83(6) may be specified as cross-border public authorities under an Order in Council made under that subsection. If an authority is so specified, certain provisions of the Bill are disapplied in respect of functions of, and functions specifically exercisable in relation to, the authority in question.

The amendments, which are genuinely technical, seek only to improve the Bill passed in the other place and are certainly worthy of support.

The auditing of cross-border public authorities was dealt with in the previous group of amendments. We seek to provide that only one auditing authority need be involved, even though there is a cross-border public body that straddles the reserve devolved function. The reference to auditing and the control of expenditure is clear, but to try to minimise the amount of auditing, it is better that one Parliament takes responsibility for that, rather than having dual auditing.

Mr. Dalyell: I am not trying to be difficult, but those could be complex matters. Is there to be a lead authority, depending on which had or was thought to have the greater share of the business?

Mr. McLeish: Essentially, the order provides for cross-border public authorities to be established. That is important. These are matters for which the Scottish Parliament could in future decide to have its own body, rather than be part of a UK set-up. In the interim, we are trying, first, to avoid dual auditing, which makes sense. Secondly, it could fall to the National Audit Office to perform the task, according to discussions that will take place. Determining the auditing authority will be a matter of common sense.

When we refer to cross-border public authorities, we are referring to the relationship between the United Kingdom and Scotland, but that also takes cognisance of the fact that Northern Ireland and Wales are part of the set-up. The Bill tries to clarify that, so that when we set up bodies, regardless of whether Scotland decides to set up its own bodies, we have a working system that eases the transition to a new system that will work efficiently.

Dr. Fox: What the Minister is saying about avoiding dual auditing is self-evidently sensible. Will there be a

voluntary code of practice? Will he write to us and tell us what consultation the Government have had with what are envisaged to be cross-border bodies and what representations have been made? We might then at least have an idea of the opinions of those groups. Although the amendments are technical, it would be helpful for us to know for future reference what is the Government's thinking on the numbers of groups involved and the balance of opinion on the question of audit.

Mr. McLeish: That is also a fair question. There have been extensive discussions with all the organisations because it is important that we get it right. When clause 84 orders are made in relation to specific bodies, specific auditing requirements will be defined. As to specific orders under clause 84, we want to ensure that each body is taken care of and has its proper procedures established so that there is no confusion as to who is taking the lead role in any particular aspect of a body's work.

Mr. Letwin: The Minister described the amendment as "technical", and I accept that. However, I am not sure that his answer was technical—if it was, it was so technical that I did not understand it. I press him once more on this point for the sake of clarity. Under amendment No. 113, the application of proposed sections 107 and 108 is disapplied when dealing with a function

"which is specifically exercisable in relation to a cross-border public authority".

However, proposed sections 107 and 108 are also disapplied when we are dealing not with that but with

"any function of such an authority".

I do not understand—and I do not see how a judge will understand—the difference between those two phrases. Could the Minister provide a concrete example of that difference?

Mr. McLeish: I can describe Government amendment No. 113, which is straightforward, but technical. It deletes the reference in clause 83 to the disapplication of clauses 107 and 108 in respect of the functions of cross-border public authorities. The amendment is purely consequential on amendment No. 180, which was debated in the previous group. Amendment No. 180 amends clause 107 to make it clear that the functions of cross-border public authorities are not Scottish functions for the purposes of that clause and clause 108. Therefore, there is no need to continue to disapply clauses 107 and 108 in relation to the functions of cross-border public authorities.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 114 to 124, 130 and 131 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 132, after clause 91, to insert the following new clause—*Human rights*—

".—(1) This Act does not enable a person—

(a) to bring any proceedings in a court or tribunal on the ground that an act is incompatible with the Convention rights, or

(b) to rely on any of the Convention rights in any such proceedings,

unless he would be a victim for the purposes of Article 34 of the Convention (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998) if proceedings in respect of the act were brought in the European Court of Human Rights.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to the Lord Advocate, the Advocate General, the Attorney General or the Attorney General for Northern Ireland.

(3) This Act does not enable a court or tribunal to award any damages in respect of an act which is incompatible with any of the Convention rights which it could not award if section 8(3) and (4) of the Human Rights Act 1998 applied.

(4) In this section "act" means—

(a) making any legislation,

(b) any other act or failure to act, if it is the act or failure of a member of the Scottish Executive."

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 133, 134, 136 to 138, 279 to 285, 299 and 300.

Mr. McLeish: Amendment No. 132 deals with the compatibility of the Scotland Bill and the Human Rights Act 1998; amendments Nos. 133 and 134 deal with the legislative power to remedy ultra vires acts; amendments Nos. 136 to 138 would ensure that the appropriate law officer is informed if a court intends to exercise its powers to vary retrospective decisions; amendments Nos. 279 to 283 refer to the definition of devolution issues; amendments Nos. 284 and 285 relate to a number of court procedural issues, including the requirement that intimation be given to the Advocate General and the Lord Advocate if a devolution issue arises in any proceedings; and amendments Nos. 299 and 300 refer to an amendment to the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 to take account of devolution issues.

That group of amendments basically comprises technical ones to clauses 92 and 93 and schedule 6 to ensure that the arrangements for judicial scrutiny are appropriate and work properly. I should remind the House about the systems put in place by the Bill for dealing with legal questions about the extent of the Parliament's powers.

The Bill creates a carefully thought through process for settling questions about the boundaries of the devolution settlement. What we propose will ensure that any legal disputes about those boundaries can be resolved consistently and authoritatively. Schedule 6, in particular, sets out the definition of "devolution issues" and the process for resolving any legal questions that arise about them. The arrangements will provide a solid foundation for developing a common understanding of the detailed extent of the powers of the Parliament and the Scottish Executive as time passes. They form a key part of our proposals.

Mr. Letwin: I draw the Minister's attention to amendment No. 132, which again deals with the question of judges and litigation. My suspicions were aroused slightly when the Minister described it as a technical amendment.

The Opposition strongly welcome what we understand to be the purport of amendment No. 132—I hope that the Minister will confirm whether we are correct. Namely, the amendment would prohibit class actions on behalf of people who are vaguely affected by some act—I am comforted to see the Minister nodding—when it could be argued loosely that they were affected by a convention

[Mr. Letwin]

right under clause 28. If that is the amendment's intention, we strongly welcome it. I should add in passing that the noble Lord Mackay of Drumadoon first pointed that out in another place, and we all owe him a debt.

Can the Minister clarify his interpretation of the critical term "victim" as it applies in this case? How does he expect that that will relate to a convention right not to be covered under clause 28, given amendment No. 132? Can he also enlighten us about how he envisages individuals pursuing those matters in the courts? Does he expect that it will be possible, nevertheless, to bring an action against Parliament or will it inevitably be against the Executive? If it is against Parliament, does anything in any of the amendments create a constitutional precedent that could have implications for this place?

6.15 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), I am prepared to accept the Minister's description of "technical" amendments. However, when he refers to a "technical explanation" of amendments, one might—with the greatest respect to the Minister—read "convoluted".

It might be useful to have some practical examples of the effects of amendment No. 132 and the previous group of amendments. They appear to bring the Bill into line with the Human Rights Act 1998, but it would be useful to have some tangible examples of the difference that they will make, and a fuller explanation thereof. I accept that the amendments are technical and I have no wish to delay the House unnecessarily, but we need an explanation, by way of example, of the difference that the amendments will make.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I do not think that amendment No. 132 is a technical amendment. I believe that it is a fairly important amendment—although I suspect not a controversial one. It seeks to bring the scope of the Bill into line with the Human Rights Act 1998, but I ask the Minister to clarify why this change has been inserted into the legislation at a late stage when we debated the matter at considerable length when it was first brought before the House. It was made quite clear then that there would be the right of challenge under the scope of the human rights convention and the Bill as then drafted. That does not appear to me to be a technical matter. The amendment introduces a considerable change—albeit a change that is in line with the House's intentions when the matter was first brought before us. I seek clarification on that point because it is important that the two pieces of legislation should match up correctly.

Mrs. Laing: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) that this is a late stage for the Government to introduce an amendment that the Minister describes as a "key part" of their proposals. If they are so important, why have we not examined those matters before? They refer to the way in which the proceedings of the Scottish Parliament coincide with or work alongside the proceedings of not only this Parliament but other quasi-judicial and quasi-parliamentary bodies—of which there seems to be an increasing number—to which we are affiliated or connected in some way. The amendment relates to important parts of the Human Rights Act 1998, which we scrutinised and considered in this place for many hours. I do not believe that I am being unduly critical by asking the Minister to explain why, if the amendments are a key part of the Government's proposals, they are being proposed now.

It is also a matter of concern that the amendments are described as technical ones. Given that the amendments cover page after page, and if they are technical, is the Minister admitting that many of the points that Conservative Members raised when the clauses were debated in Committee had been overlooked at the time and have had to be considered since?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We cannot go into the history of the Bill. The motion before us asks whether we agree with the Lords in their amendment. It is a question of agreeing or disagreeing, not wondering why we got here.

Mrs. Laing: I was seeking to clarify some points about the amendments so that I could consider whether we should agree or disagree with the Lords amendments. Thank you for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Hayes: It would help those with less acute minds than your own, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Minister would clarify the point by citing an example. We accept that the amendments are technical, but we should be grateful if the Minister illustrated that by citing an example. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset asked for examples when we debated the previous group of amendments; he did not get them. By providing practical examples, perhaps the Minister will satisfy those of us who have reservations about the interface between the two pieces of legislation.

Mrs. Laing: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of that point, which I should have made. I am sure that the Minister took the note of my hon. Friend's observation.

Once again, I seek clarification to enable us to consider whether the clauses have been properly scrutinised by the House before we can decide whether to agree or disagree with the Lords amendment.

Mr. McLeish: Setting aside the bit of melodrama at the end of the hon. Lady's speech, I point out that our aim is consistency. The matter is technical. The amendments have been debated; they make sense, and we ask the House to support them.

Technically, the Scottish Parliament will be a public authority under the Human Rights Act 1998, but in most cases we would expect the Executive to be the subject of any actions on that. Government amendment No. 132 ensures that the Scotland Bill and the Human Rights Act 1998 are consistent in terms of title and interest and the award of damages. Only those with title and interest—that is, Law Officers or anyone who would be a victim in terms of section 7(6) of the Human Rights Act 1998—could bring proceedings about the alleged contravention of the convention rights, about whether an action is incompatible with those convention rights.

It is intended to restrict the members of the public who can mount a challenge involving such questions to those who can bring proceedings against the public authority

under section 7(7) of the Human Rights Act 1998. That ensures consistency between the Scotland Bill and the Human Rights Act 1998 about who can bring proceedings. Scots law would probably already have the effect that only such victims would have had title and interest. We are making a straightforward attempt to achieve consistency.

Hon. Members asked for examples. I should like to respond fully and give some illustrations, but the key points are that the amendment is technical, that it makes sense, and that there should be no suspicion that the matter has not been properly considered. The amendment will improve the Bill; that is the purpose of all the amendments that we are discussing tonight.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 133 to 138 agreed to.

Clause 95

POWER TO MAKE PROVISION CONSEQUENTIAL ON ACTS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT.

Lords amendment: No. 139, in page 45, line 4, at end insert

("or made by legislation mentioned in subsection (2).

(2) The legislation is subordinate legislation under an Act of Parliament made by—

(a) a member of the Scottish Executive,

(b) a Scottish public authority with mixed functions or no reserved functions, or

(c) any other person (not being a Minister of the Crown) if the function of making the legislation is exercisable within devolved competence.")

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 140 to 146, 152, 157, 158, 160 to 169, 174 to 179, 184 and 286, Lords amendment No. 286, and amendment (a) thereto.

Mr. McLeish: I am reluctant to say that the amendments are technical, but we do have a technical amendment to Lords amendment No. 286.

This large group of amendments deals with various powers under the Bill to make subordinate legislation. Among our aims is to clarify the scope of the power to split ministerial functions under clause 97.

We also aim to split quantitative obligations under clause 97. The amendments provide that, where the power in clause 97 is used to split a European Community or international obligation which is expressed in quantitative terms so that part of it can be transferred to Scottish Ministers, the order will not be made unless they have been consulted.

The amendments in the group also ensure that the Secretary of State's powers of intervention in clause 54 can be used to ensure that the Scottish Ministers' share of a quantitative obligation is met.

The general provisions about subordinate legislation have been redrafted to make them easier to use and to take on board recommendations of the Delegated Powers Scrutiny Committee in another place that subordinate legislation under the Bill which amends primary legislation should be subject to affirmative resolution procedure.

The amendments also deal with the transfer of property to Scottish Ministers, the Lord Advocate and the Scottish parliamentary corporate body.

Finally, the amendments deal with the making of provision consequential on Acts of the Scottish Parliament.

Dr. Fox: The Minister will be pleased to hear that I accept that most of the amendments in the group are purely technical. However, I shall probe him on one or two areas—not least on Lords amendment No. 146, which is fairly substantial.

My questions mainly concern the quantitative relationship. We could all think of many areas where such a relationship might apply. In such areas, the working relationship between the Westminster Government and the Scottish Parliament—the Scottish Executive—will be extraordinarily important.

By what mechanism will consultation take place? Given that international obligations are involved, and given that quantitative distribution is involved—say environmental examples, such as on carbon dioxide emissions, where Scotland would be expected to play its part in fulfilling Britain's international obligations—how will the process work in practice? Is this to be among the areas where there will be a concordat? Will the matter be set down on paper? Shall we know in advance how it will work? Or will it simply be left to good will?

The Minister says that no Westminster Government would give a quantitative responsibility on an international obligation to the Scottish Parliament without consultation. I believe that it is legitimate to ask what that consultation will consist of. Will it be a full written and clearly delineated consultation exercise, according to a procedure about which we shall know in advance? Or will there simply be a telephone call to say, "By the way, we have agreed that that is what it's going to be; now you have been consulted. That's it. Thank you very much"? There is a world of different between those two extremes.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household): How could you suggest such a thing?

Dr. Fox: When the hon. Gentleman has spent as long in government as the Conservatives did, he will know how such a situation can come about—although I hope, for the benefit of the rest of us, that he does not gain that experience.

What will the proposals mean? They make a difference. Earlier in the Bill's passage we said that, where there is potential for conflict between Westminster and the Scottish Parliament, we must consider what would happen in a worst-case scenario. I am not being flippant. A conflict might arise if the form of the consultation process had not been set out far enough in advance and we did not know the mechanisms according to which it would occur.

All I want is for the Minister to tell us the Government's thinking. The Secretary of State said that we must consider the worst-case scenario—that is what I

[Dr. Fox]

am asking the Minister to do. What would happen if a Westminster Government were putting on to a Scottish Parliament what the Scottish Parliament thought was a disproportionate element of a quantitative international obligation? There does not seem to be a mechanism for resolving disputes. Subsection (4) of amendment No. 146 contains the words

"Scottish Ministers have been consulted",

but we know no more about that. The Minister should tell us what that means.

6.30 pm

Amendments Nos. 160 to 169 represent a substantial rewriting of the Bill. We would argue that as a result of work done in another place, there has been a significant improvement in the Bill, compared with the original drafting that came to this House. However, as there has been such substantial rewriting and so many new points have been added, one wonders why that was not in the original Bill presented to the House.

Furthermore, given that substantial rewriting was required for a Bill that received an enormous amount of drafting time, and given that it was done in the Chamber to which those on the Government Front Bench are instinctively hostile, does not that reinforce the case for a revising Chamber? If ever there was such a case, it is made by these 10 amendments. The Government considered that there were so many flaws in the structure of their flagship legislation that they had to go back to the drawing board and draft it again.

It is surely legitimate for us to ask what would happen if this were a piece of Scottish Parliament legislation and there were no revising Chamber. What would the Government do then? In the new, improved form of this section of the Bill, hon. Members on both sides of the House have much to be grateful to the other place for. Without that revising Chamber, what would we have done?

Mr. Dalyell: I realise that we are short of time, but my curiosity overcomes me. Do hon. Members on the Conservative Front Bench want a revising Chamber?

Dr. Fox: In all the previous stages of the Bill we have recognised that the lack of any revision mechanism would be a serious deficit in the procedures of the Scottish Parliament. The hon. Gentleman will know that in the other place we tabled amendments to try to introduce time lags in the Bill as a substitute for a separate revising Chamber, so that those who had doubts about the contents of and procedures in a Bill would have time to make representations. That, of course, has disappeared.

The Minister speaks of the improved drafting of the Bill and the amendments that the Government tabled. The Government could not have done that under the procedures in their own Bill. The irony is not lost on us. Let us hope that the deficiencies do not cause poor legislation to be introduced in the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I agree with my hon. Friend about the desirability of the revising Chamber and the way in which that is highlighted by the amendment. No doubt the Minister would reply that the deficiency is made up for by extensive reliance on pre-legislative scrutiny, but that depends heavily on the public and on public and professional bodies doing their work. That is a largely uncharted course and unproven—but I digress.

My question is simple, and it arises from reading the Bill with an untrained mind—certainly not a legal mind. Is it the purpose of the amendment to bring about a formal consultation of Scottish Ministers in matters where the United Kingdom Government will deal with our international obligations?

Mr. Hayes: Will my hon. Friend add to that the implications of the amendment for the relationship between Scottish Ministers and the new constitutional arrangements? We spend a great deal of time speaking about the relationship between this place and the new Parliament, but I am interested in what my hon. Friend and the Minister believe the amendment suggests for the relationship between Scottish Ministers and the new Parliament. Does the amendment affect other aspects of the Bill; and can that be explained during this evening's proceedings?

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend anticipates me. I intended to ask the Minister for his views. It is inevitable and desirable that the Scottish Executive should be consulted and its views sought and understood. However, this House will rightly continue to contain a large number of Scottish Members of Parliament, who remain in this place to scrutinise Government activities in those spheres. To what extent does consulting the Scottish Executive have implications for their role in this House?

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I refer to amendment No. 286, which inserts a new schedule in the Bill and sets out certain types of procedure for subordinate legislation. That is a welcome step forward for clarification, but on even a brief reading we find that if paragraph 3 applies, instead of Type F procedure, Type A procedure shall apply, and so on. For further Bills, would flow charts meet statutory requirements? I welcome the efforts that have been made to simplify the legislation, but flow charts might be the ultimate in simplification.

Mr. McLeish: They might lead me to understand the measure more than I do, which could be a hindrance in some circumstances.

I shall deal first with amendment No. 146, then with subordinate legislation and the new schedule in amendment No. 286. Amendment No. 146 amends clause 97 in two ways. First, in the new subsections (4) and (5), it provides that, where the clause 97 power is used to split a European Community or international obligation that is expressed in quantitative terms so that part of it can be transferred to Scottish Office Ministers, the order will not be made unless they have been consulted. That is important. Secondly, new subsection (6) will ensure that the Secretary of State's powers of intervention under clause 54 can be used to ensure that the Scottish Ministers' share of a quantitative international obligation is met.

Examples of international obligations and obligations under European Community law that will fall within the scope of these amendments are likely to include EC

quotas for livestock subsidies, and the United Kingdom's obligations under the Kyoto protocol on climate change and related Community law to achieve certain targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

All parts of the UK will be required to meet a fair proportion of such obligations, not least to ensure that unfair burdens are not placed upon business in one area compared to another. Where it is possible for the Scottish Ministers to contribute to the achievement of the obligation through the exercise of their powers, it is obviously right that they should be apportioned a share of the obligation. An order under clause 97 will enable that to be done. The order will be made by a Minister of the United Kingdom Government or by Her Majesty in Council on the advice of such a Minister, and will be subject to procedure at Westminster only.

The amendment sets out the procedure to be pursued. Consultation will be required, but it would be impossible to define at this stage what that will mean. A framework will be defined for such consultation. The final order will be processed in this House.

Dr. Fox: I am less reassured than I was at the beginning. This is an area where there could be litigation over devolution. We need certain information in this debate, not least the minimum definition of consultation that satisfies the legality of the Bill. The Minister says that there will be some form of consultation, but what will that mean? When the matter goes to court, as it surely will, what is the Government's legal advice on what constitutes minimum acceptable consultation under the terms of this part of the Bill?

Mr. McLeish: It is absurd to suggest that we can clarify and define that this evening. The changes that we are suggesting should be set against a background of important European and international obligations. It makes sense that a process should be established that will deal with quantitative obligations. That is the first major point. Obviously the Government will continue to work within the context of the Scotland Act, which I hope the measure will become after this week, and that of the Scottish Office. Our purpose will be to work out specifically what will be involved in consultation. I do not think that it would be appropriate this evening to try to speculate on what, in the Opposition's eyes, inadequacy would be.

Mr. Grieve: I appreciate that what consultation may or may not be is a difficult thing to define. However, it would be helpful if the Minister spelt out the reality of who calls the shots. United Kingdom Ministers will decide, after having consulted, how the quotas will be allocated, and that is the end of the matter. I am sure that he will confirm that to the House.

Mr. McLeish: First, we accept that there is a serious attempt by the Westminster Parliament to discuss obligations with the Holyrood Parliament. However, we have discussed before European Community and international obligations and the need for the Holyrood Parliament to be consistent in its application of these obligations. We are talking about a further situation where we have not qualitative but quantitative considerations. It seems elementary and straightforward that if there is a process of consultation to be defined, it will clearly flow, as a framework, from the amendment that we shall agree this evening and from the Bill when it is enacted and becomes law.

Mr. Letwin: I must ask the Minister to answer the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) put in an earlier intervention. Would United Kingdom Ministers, following consultation, lay down what the quotas are to be, and that would be the end of the matter?

Mr. McLeish: That is not what we have said. As for international obligations, Scotland will be able to go much further on the basis of the devolution settlement than Scottish Office Ministers can now. We are saying that we must take international obligations very seriously. Scotland is obliged to implement these obligations. That is not to say that Scotland will want to do something else.

First, we are talking of obligations that have been placed on the United Kingdom, so there must be a process to deal with them. That is elementary. Secondly, if that process is to work, there must be a basis upon which we consult. That is put into the Bill by the technical amendment that we are considering. If a debating point is being made, it will not wash. We know that international obligations are vital and we are ensuring that when we consider quotas, in respect of the environment or anything else, there will be proper discussions between the two Executives in proceeding to implement international obligations. I think that it is very straightforward.

Mr. Dalyell: I hardly expect Ministers to endorse the perspicacity of its choice of individual to do it, but the fact is that Heriot-Watt decided, wisely or unwisely, to ask me to give the Lothian lecture on Friday on the subject of devolution, science and technology and the environment. The Government Whip gives a wry smile but that is the position that I am in.

I am asking for some guidance. Am I wrong in thinking that at the end of the day these delicate questions of quotas—not only fish but carbon dioxide emissions—depend on what the Government must call good sense and good will, and that there is no legal framework on which to allocate responsibilities? We must all hope that the good will is to be found. Is there anything other than good will for deciding these matters?

Mr. McLeish: That is just not true. The 190 hours that we have spent dealing with the Bill have been about creating a legal framework that will enable us to debate and discuss issues and process and implement decisions that are applicable both to Westminster, if that be necessary, and Holyrood. I can reassure my hon. Friend. I shall write to him with the full back-up of the framework with which we are dealing. It is right to say—I shall make what I hope is the final point—that written into the Bill is consultation in respect of European and international obligations. From that will flow the framework that will make that consultation work.

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way once again. We agree that there must be a mechanism for dealing with quotas. We also agree that there has to be consultation. However, in the event of disagreement, who makes the final decision about the allocation of quotas within the United Kingdom? On whom will that legal responsibility and power actually fall?

6.45 pm

Mr. McLeish: To repeat a point made earlier, I said that such matters would be dealt with in this House after due consultation.

The fact that is missing from Opposition arguments is that we need to have a fixed and agreed position on international and European Community obligations. That means, rightly so, the necessity for dialogue and consultation. Is it too radical to suggest that the Opposition might see that as sensible and straightforward? I repeat again that a framework is outlined in the Bill that will take us forward on these issues. There is nothing terribly surprising before us. However, the Opposition always want to try to recreate a bit of interest about matters that have been discussed during various stages in the other place and in this place. There is nothing dramatic before us this evening. We simply have a consultation process built into an existing clause.

Mr. Grieve: Just when one felt that the debate on the Bill was coming gently to its end, it is interesting how matters are reawakened and we return to the central principles and the difficulties in the operation of this proposed legislation. The Minister says that we are failing to understand the spirit behind the proposed legislation but I understand that spirit very well. I understand also its limitations. It is—*[Interruption.]* Does the Minister want me to give way to him?

Mr. McLeish: No, I am just breathing.

Mr. Grieve: If we consider the way in which the proposed legislation will operate in practice, it will be a fertile area for dispute. What is said to be consultation is all part of the happy-clappy inclusiveness which the Government serve up to us. Everybody can be happy, clappy and inclusive as long as everyone agrees with the decision that the Government will make.

I fail to see how the consultation process, as it is added in by the amendment, will serve any purpose if it is spelt out statutorily if, ultimately, Ministers in Whitehall will have to take the final decision—under considerable pressure, one may suspect, from the electorate south of the border as much as that north of the border. The debate has served to bring that out.

I am worried not that the Minister has presented the amendment and asked us to approve it but by the slightly mealy-mouthed way in which he tries to avoid spelling out the truth behind the amendment. All these things get dressed up. Instead of telling the House, "This is the position, there is a consultation mechanism but at the end of the day Whitehall Ministers will have to decide how allocations are implemented fairly on a United Kingdom basis", the process is dressed up. At the end of the day it is suggested that by the mechanism that has been put before us those north of the border will have an input on a statutory basis into the way in which the formulae are arrived at. That is not correct.

Mr. Hayes: I am hesitant to interrupt my hon. Friend's Anglo-Catholic sermon. Perhaps the Minister can deal with the issue best by adopting the course that we have asked him to follow when discussing previous groups of amendments and using illustrations. We look for some tangible and practical illustrations of how the process would work in practice. In my judgment it is all very well to talk about technical amendments but unless we translate them into practicalities, it is rather hard for us to make judgments about them.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am not sure about the Anglo-Catholicism of my speech—it may be Anglo-Scottish for all I know. As I have often said to the Minister, I hope that the legislation works. However, it is incumbent on the Opposition to point out areas in which it may prove to be deficient.

Mr. Syms: The Minister alluded to the proposed subsection (5) under amendment No. 146, which says:

"defined by reference to a quantity (whether expressed as an amount, proportion or ratio or otherwise)".

That leaves a lot of room for misunderstanding. Will this matter be set out in a concordat between the Scottish Executive and the Government so that people know the ground rules in respect of areas of policy, or will it be an ad hoc arrangement—

Mr. McLeish *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Syms: The Minister shakes his head. That is very important because there might be differences over consultation, not only over what people should be consulted about but over what weight should be given to respective consultations.

The Bill seems to be moving towards some kind of formula whereby people would know where they stand on these issues. I welcome that because it diminishes the potential for disputes. It would be extremely helpful if the Minister would reassure us that that matter will be negotiated between the Scottish Assembly and the Government.

Mr. McLeish: I can give the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) total reassurance on an extremely well made point.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 140 to 152 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Clause 100

REGULATION OF TWEED AND ESK FISHERIES

Lords amendment: No. 153, in page 46, leave out lines 12 and 13 and insert

("or in connection with the conservation, management and exploitation of salmon, trout, eels and freshwater fish in the Border rivers.

(1A) An Order under subsection (1) may—

(a) exclude the application of section 49 in relation to any Border rivers function,

(b) confer power to make subordinate legislation.

(1B) In particular, provision may be made by such an Order—

(a) conferring any function on a Minister of the Crown, the Scottish Ministers or a public body in relation to the Border rivers,

(b) for any Border rivers function exercisable by any person to be exercisable instead by a person (or another person) mentioned in paragraph (a),

(c) for any Border rivers function exercisable by any person to be exercisable concurrently or jointly with, or with the agreement of or after consultation with, a person (or another person) mentioned in paragraph (a).")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. McLeish.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 154 to 156, 192, 195 and 209.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): I shall deal first with amendments Nos. 153 to 156, which cover ground that was debated hastily, under urgent timetable pressure, earlier in the proceedings. We now have from the Lords a much expanded definition compared with the original. However, it is quite complex and I hope that the Minister will explain it a little further.

The essential principle that concerns my constituents and me is that what happens in England should not be decided merely by the Scottish Parliament without reference to my constituents' representations, which will be made through this House. *[Interruption.]* Those who suggest that adjusting the boundary could solve the problem had better have another look at the atlas, because it would be a fairly substantial boundary adjustment.

If the Scottish Parliament decided to allow Sunday fishing on the River Till—a considerable distance south of the border—which would add to pressure on river stocks, current UK legislation would preclude it. However, if the Scottish Parliament became enthusiastic for such a change, or for such a change on the entire Tweed river system, my constituents would have a legitimate interest in resisting that change.

One could imagine other changes, especially as the clause includes environmental aspects that could be significant. If legislation passed in the Scottish Parliament required the removal of various kinds of cauld that exist on the river system now, landowners would be involved in significant expense. We therefore need to be clear that there would then be an effective process of representation through this Parliament, and that any orders made would have regard to that.

What will be the position on commencement day? Will we have to wait some time for an order under clause 100? If so, what will be the position in the mean time? Will the legislation be accompanied by an immediate order under clause 100, or will there be a significant period in which all those matters will be dealt with by Westminster? I do not understand what happens in that interim period. I should be grateful for the Minister's reassurance on both those points, which affect the property and livelihood of a number of my constituents.

Amendments Nos. 192, 195 and 209 define the "Scottish zone" and an order will subsequently amplify the definition. Will that be done immediately, or will we wait for a long time before we have a definition? What happens if we wait for a long time? Will the order introduced under clause 112(2), to which amendment No. 195 refers, create a new definition of the "Scottish zone" and the boundary between Scotland and England out to sea? That is an intriguing prospect, as nobody has produced a satisfactory definition thus far and there are sharp differences of view as to where that boundary should lie.

Of more immediate significance to my constituents are the references to Scottish fishing boats because many boats fishing from ports in my constituency are registered in Scotland. The effect of these amendments appears to be that the fishing activities of a Scottish-registered boat fishing in the English zone would be regulated by the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. McLeish *indicated assent.*

Mr. Beith: The Minister agrees that that is the correct interpretation. It is easy to understand the logic that, if a vessel is registered in Scotland and its owner fishes in Scottish waters, he has accepted obligations to Scotland which make it appropriate that he should be regulated by Scotland. It is slightly more questionable when, for historical or other reasons, a vessel is registered in Scotland and its owner fishes off Seahouses or Amble and is nevertheless regulated wholly by the Scottish Parliament. Has the Minister thought about that; and will he clarify the position?

Dr. Fox: The question of the River Esk was raised in the other place on several occasions. Will the Minister give us some quick clarifications? As the House knows, the management of the River Esk and the right to its source has been claimed by the North West Water authority, the National Rivers Authority, and now the Environment Agency. When it comes to the question of management, exactly how will joint authorities work together, and what will their relative responsibilities be? If the Minister cannot answer now, I should be grateful if he wrote to me explaining exactly how that will be worked out. I hope that the details of this specific example, as opposed to the generic one that we discussed under the previous group of amendments, have been sorted out because it is a very practical issue that has caused many problems.

May I make a plea for anglers? What is the current position in the Bill regarding rod licensing? That matter was raised in the other place and we did not quite get an answer then.

It may be appropriate to finish discussion of this group of amendments and the Bill by asking about a fixed boundary in the Solway Firth. Given that the centre of the channel moves, how will that come about? Are we to attempt to restrict and fix in legislation something that is wholly flexible and movable in nature? Let us hope that our attempt to do that is better than our attempts in some other parts of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): I do not want to oppose the amendments, but I should like to congratulate the Minister on his efficient and, as ever, competent dispatch of business.

It is appropriate that consideration of the Bill is ending with amendments relating to the River Sark and the River Tweed. This whole saga started in 1974—that long saga is coming to an end as far as the House is concerned, but for Scotland a new story is beginning.

7 pm

Mr. McLeish: I shall be brief, and I think that I can satisfy all the points that hon. Members have raised.

[Mr. McLeish]

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to the Tweed and the Esk. Clearly, these will be matters for both Parliaments, so I cannot predict when decisions will be made. There will be no change to the status quo in the interim, and it will be up to the Parliament, along with Westminster, to define its priorities and what changes will be put in place.

In providing for fisheries to be devolved, the Government have always recognised that special arrangements would be required in respect of the two border river systems which straddle the boundary between England and Scotland. It is universally accepted that fisheries management needs to be approached on a whole-river basis. In doing so, however, anyone responsible for fisheries management for a river system which lies in England and Scotland would have to operate under the law of both England and Scotland. It is necessary, therefore, that the laws for regulating fisheries should be same on both sides of the border.

Our task in respect of the Bill, therefore, is to enable both Parliaments to approve such laws, but in a way that ensures that they both approve the same laws. The Government amendments to clause 100 are intended to allow much the same approach to be taken for the two border rivers between Scotland and England. In effect, we are providing for the legal framework for each of those rivers to be established by Orders in Council—which would be prepared by the Fisheries Departments in both countries in co-operation—and for such Orders in Council to be capable of addressing the wide range of tasks involved in fisheries management.

Such Orders in Council should also be flexible enough to offer a wide range of legal mechanisms for fisheries management, much as would be open for each Parliament if it were acting independently. We have to get it right on both sides of the river, and we have established in the Bill a framework for making sure that that is the case.

On sea fisheries, Government amendments Nos. 29, 192, 195, 209 and 252 relate to the devolution of functions in respect of the regulation of sea fishing. In the White Paper "Scotland's Parliament", the Government made clear their intention to devolve functions relating to sea fisheries, subject to suitable co-ordination arrangements to ensure effective discharge of United Kingdom obligations. The devolution of functions exercised at sea has raised for the Bill particular questions which have required careful thought, and the amendments are the product of that further thought. They are intended to ensure effective devolution.

As hon Members will understand, the exercise of ministerial and other functions in relation to the regulation of sea fishing will often mean that functions are being exercised outside Scotland. I should remind the House that, for the purposes of the Bill, Scotland includes the 12-mile territorial seas around Scotland, as provided in clause 112.

When such regulatory functions are exercised outside Scotland, there will need to be clear connections to Scotland to justify action being taken by the Scottish Ministers, and for Scottish courts to recognise jurisdiction in trying offences under Scots law. At sea, however, it is possible to envisage various possible connections to Scotland that might be thought to satisfy the condition "as regards Scotland".

I am conscious that the requirement to implement devolution for sea fisheries has raised a number of problems for legal advisers and, indeed, for United Kingdom Fisheries Ministers, who remain determined to ensure that United Kingdom obligations to manage fisheries under the common fisheries policy are implemented effectively.

Scottish Ministers will be responsible for managing fisheries within the Scottish zone, and for managing Scottish boats. Ministry of Agriculture Ministers will be responsible for managing fisheries within the waters adjacent to England and for managing English boats. The responsibilities of the Welsh and Northern Ireland Ministers and Assemblies will be a matter for their own legislation.

That overlapping set of responsibilities, which arise because of the need to regulate in respect of sea area and fishing boats which may operate in various areas, opens up a possibility that United Kingdom fishing boats may have to operate under the authority of separate licences issued by the fisheries administration. That is not on the horizon at present. The question of the zone is being considered and discussed, and that consideration will be published when that point is reached. Again, decisions on that will be taken by the new Parliament.

Mr. Beith: Do I understand the Minister to have expressed concern at the confusion that could arise if two boats fishing in the same part of English waters happened to be registered one in Scotland and one in England—even though they were both operating out of the same English port—and that the discussions have some time to go to find a satisfactory resolution?

Mr. McLeish: I can confirm that that is the case. This is an area of regulation that we want to get right, and it will be dealt with.

I hope that this is the last time that the Bill is considered by the House. I should respond to the point made by the hon. Member for Woodspring, which showed the spirit in which the Bill has been considered—it has been a highly technical discussion. He referred to the definition of freshwater fisheries management in the Solway firth.

Under the current legal definition of the Esk, the estuarial limit is drawn to include all the inner Solway firth. There are significant salmon fisheries in that part of the firth, and there are distinctive practices and regulations governing those salmon fisheries in England and Scotland. The relevant management bodies have drawn to our attention the fact that significant difficulties arise for enforcement of salmon fisheries regulations as a result of the fluid nature of the boundary between England and Scotland in the Solway firth. That is at the heart of the point that has been made.

The boundary in the Solway firth has, for many purposes, been taken to be the medium filum of the Esk, and then the combined Esk and Eden rivers at low tide. Things are not getting much simpler as we move through the Bill. The topography of the inner Solway firth is such that that channel can move considerably, and it is difficult to demonstrate to the satisfaction of a court where the channel may have been at any point in time. That has been a frustration for enforcement agencies in that area—not for many years, but for many generations.

The good news is that the Government are considering that issue to come up with some final legal resolution to that on-going conundrum.

Dr. Fox: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As this may be the final time that we discuss the Bill, may I, on behalf of the Opposition, thank you, the other Deputy Speakers and, through you, Madam Speaker, for the way in which procedures have been conducted, especially the long stages in the middle of our consideration?

May I also, through the Minister, thank his civil servants for the information with which we were supplied during consideration of the Bill? Without that, it would have been impossible to come forward with constructive opposition. The Bill is much improved, although, as the Minister noted, we have finished with a debate which has been as clear as mud.

Mr. Wallace: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I associate the Liberal Democrats with the remarks of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)? We thank you, your fellow Deputy Speakers and Madam Speaker, as well as Ministers and officials.

If the Minister and his colleagues show flexibility on the one matter that we have referred back to the other place, this may indeed be the last time that we have to debate the Bill on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): There is no need for me to comment on those kind points of order.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 154 to 214, 221 to 236, and 279 to 285 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 286 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 287 to 297, and 298 to 302 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments: Mr. Desmond Browne, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Oliver Letwin, Mrs. Anne McGuire and Mr. Henry McLeish; Mr. Henry McLeish to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES BILL
[WAYS AND MEANS]

7.9 pm

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Regional Development Agencies Bill, it is expedient to authorise the imposition of charges to corporation tax by provisions relating to the taxation of persons who are transferors or transferees in relation to schemes under the Act for the transfer of property, rights or liabilities.

I shall say a few words by way of explanation of the resolution standing in the name of the Financial Secretary. The Bill returned from the other place includes a new clause before clause 38 on corporation tax. The clause is designed to achieve tax neutrality, in that transfers under the Bill should not trigger a charge to tax. The need for ways and means cover arises because the effect of that may, in principle, involve a change in the incidence of tax as between the transferor and the transferee.

Question agreed to.

Question put and agreed to.

Regional Development Agencies Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 2

CONSTITUTION

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, line 4, after ("area,") insert—

("( ) such persons as appear to him to represent the interests of those who live, work or carry on business in rural parts of the agency's area,")

7.10 pm

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The Bill, as we sent it to the other place, provided a general list of the types of people whom the Secretary of State must consult before making an appointment. The list included representatives of local authorities, employers, employees and others. Each heading in the list could be said to encompass rural interests no less than non-rural interests. I can confirm that that is how we have proceeded.

None the less, we are a listening Government, and we have been happy to listen to those who have said that their concern about identifying board members with rural expertise will persist unless the Government put it beyond any doubt that rural interests will be consulted about appointments now and—what seemed to cause most concern—in the future. We were happy to table the amendment in the other place to do just that. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): This is a minimalist, grudging amendment that has been brought about by effective Conservative opposition. The Minister says that he wants to place it beyond any doubt that the Government are concerned about rural interests. That has been in doubt for a long time, particularly during the passage of the Bill, and it remains in doubt to this day.

The amendment goes some way towards meeting the Conservative party's point about rural representation. In the other place, a similar amendment was rejected, on the odd ground that it was not appropriate for London. That amendment proposed that a representative who was an expert or had some involvement in rural interests should sit on the development agency.

We accept that this amendment ensures that rural interests will be consulted. Our concern is that pressures grow, and it will be all too easy for urban interests to dominate debates inside the development agency. The amendment does not fully alleviate that concern, but it provides some consultation of rural interests, and as such we are happy to support it.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): The Liberal Democrats are grateful that this matter has been considered and an acceptable form of words has been found. Many of the divisions in our society between urban and rural areas are based on misconceptions. It was important to address this issue, and it has come back before us today. Many people in rural areas will feel more satisfied that their voice will be heard under these new structures.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I, too, am relieved that some element of rural representation has been accepted in the amendment from the other place. As the representative of a rural area in West Sussex, I have two concerns outstanding. The RDAs will, in effect, clearly take the lead on transport policy, and, in practice, may take the lead on structural planning. Those are two key rural issues, and I express the great concern of my constituents from all parties that the powers of county councils, particularly rural county councils, will be emasculated.

Mr. Caborn: I can clarify the position for the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). Planning and transport powers will not be assigned to regional development agencies.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 25

POWER TO ALTER REGIONS

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 13, line 20, leave out from ("instrument") to end of line 21 and insert—

("(8) No order shall be made under this section unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

(9) An order under this section which would, apart from this subsection, be treated for the purposes of the standing orders of either House of Parliament as a hybrid instrument shall proceed in that House as if it were not such an instrument.")

7.15 pm

Mr. Caborn: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Clause 25 deals with the Secretary of State's powers to alter the regions of RDAs by order. In the Bill sent to the other place, the order was to be subject to the negative resolution procedure in both Houses, following consultation with interested parties and, where appropriate, a public inquiry.

Amendment No. 2 provides for orders made under clause 25 to be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure rather than the negative resolution procedure, as provided for in the Bill as drafted. That reflects a recommendation from the House of Lords Delegated Powers Scrutiny Committee, which the Government were content to accept.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 35

POWERS IN RELATION TO THE COMMISSION

Lords amendment: No. 3, in page 16, line 6, at end insert—

("( ) make provision conferring on the Commission functions with respect to the provision of services of any description to regional development agencies,")

Mr. Caborn: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 4 to 6.

Mr. Caborn: These amendments are purely technical. Amendments Nos. 3 and 5 allow the Secretary of State to

specify, by order, that English Partnerships and the Rural Development Commission may provide services to the RDAs. We have in mind the provision of IT services in particular, so as to ensure that the expertise and the IT systems of EP and the RDC are available to the RDAs in the early days, to enable them to become established quickly and seamlessly. That is without prejudice to the wishes of the RDAs to consider their long-term strategies.

Amendments Nos. 4 and 6 relate to the making of schemes to transfer staff and assets from EP or the RDC to other public bodies, other than RDAs. Throughout the Bill, transfers of staff and assets from EP, the RDC or Government offices to RDAs are effected by transfer schemes to be approved by the Secretary of State. The amendments make it clear that transfer schemes relating to transfers from EP and RDC to other public bodies can be prepared in a similar way, separate from the orders made under clauses 35 or 37. I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 4 to 6 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 7, before clause 38, to insert the following new clause—*Corporation tax*—

".—(1) The following provisions apply for the purposes of the Corporation Tax Acts.

(2) Any trade or part of a trade transferred under a transfer scheme is to be treated as having been, at the time of its commencement and at all times since that time, a separate trade carried on by the transferee.

(3) Where any trade, or part of a trade, is transferred under a transfer scheme, the trade carried on by the transferee after the date of the transfer is to be treated as the same trade as that which, by virtue of subsection (2), it is treated as having carried on before that date.

(4) All property, rights and liabilities transferred under a transfer scheme are to be treated as having been, at the time when they became vested in the transferor, and at all times since that time, property, rights and liabilities of the transferee.

(5) Anything done, in relation to property, rights and liabilities transferred under a transfer scheme, by the transferor is to be deemed to have been done by the transferee.

(6) Where any property, rights and liabilities transferred under a transfer scheme became vested in the transferor by virtue of a transfer made by a company in which, at the time of the transfer, the transferor held an interest, that interest is to be deemed to have been held at that time by the transferee.

(7) Where any property, rights and liabilities transferred under a transfer scheme became vested in the transferor by virtue of a qualifying transfer, or two or more successive qualifying transfers

(a) subsection (4) has effect as if the reference to the time when the property, rights and liabilities became vested in the transferor were a reference to the time when they became vested in the original transferor (that is to say, the transferor under the qualifying transfer or, as the case may be, the first of the qualifying transfers), and

(b) if the property, rights and liabilities became vested in the original transferor by virtue of a transfer made by a company in which, at the time of the transfer, the original transferor held an interest, that interest is to be deemed to have been held at that time by the transferee under the transfer scheme.

(8) The previous provisions of this section are subject to such apportionments of unallowed tax losses and of expenditure by reference to which capital allowances may be made as may be specified in the transfer scheme concerned.

(9) This section has effect in relation to accounting periods beginning after the final accounting period.

(10) In this section—

"capital allowance" has the same meaning as in the Tax Acts;

"final accounting period" means the last complete accounting period of the transferor under the transfer scheme concerned;

"qualifying transfer" means a transfer made to one of the following bodies by another such body—

(a) the Development Commission,

(b) the Urban Regeneration Agency,

(c) a regional development agency;

"transfer scheme" means—

(a) an order under section 25 which includes provision for the transfer of property, rights or liabilities, and

(b) a scheme under any of sections 34 to 37 for the transfer of property, rights or liabilities;

"unallowed tax losses" means any losses, allowances or amounts which, as at the end of the final accounting period, are tax losses within the meaning given by section 400(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988."

Mr. Caborn: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I inform the House that this amendment involves privilege.

Mr. Caborn: This is a technical amendment, to ensure that the transfer of assets in schemes made under the Bill is neutral for the purposes of corporation tax. The amendment follows a similar provision contained in the Electricity Act 1989. It provides that the body receiving the assets stands in the shoes of the body from which they have been transferred, so that, for tax purposes, it is as if the assets had not changed hands. That is particularly important in the case of assets transferred to the RDAs from English Partnerships.

Part of English Partnerships' work is to reclaim land for redevelopment. When the land is sold, English Partnerships is liable to pay tax on the proceeds, but can offset against that the cost of reclamation and other work. The amendment will allow an RDA to offset against tax expenditure incurred by English Partnerships before the land was transferred to the RDA. Without it, the RDA would be liable to pay tax on the whole of the increased value of the land, regardless of the fact that much of that would be due to the money that English Partnerships had invested in reclaiming it.

The Corporation Tax Act 1988 provides for similar arrangements in the case of companies in common ownership; but, as "common ownership" is defined there in terms of share capital, we need specific provision in the case of non-departmental public bodies in the common ownership of the Secretary of State.

I commend the amendment to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to [Special Entry].

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed and for disagreeing to the Commons amendment to the Bill in lieu, considered.

Lords Reason:

The Lords insist on their Amendments in page 2, lines 1, 2, 15 and 18, to which the Commons have disagreed, for the following Reason:

Because electors should be able to vote for the individual party candidate of their choice.

7.20 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments, but does not insist on its amendment in lieu.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the further Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendments, in page 3, line 46, at end insert—

'Review of electoral system

.—(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint one or more persons—

(a) to review, in accordance with subsection (2), the operation of the system of election provided for by section 3 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 as substituted by section 1 of this Act, and

(b) to make a report to the Secretary of State within six months from the day of appointment.

(2) The review shall consider, in particular, how the ability of electors to vote for particular persons on a party's list of candidates might affect the results of an election.

(3) The Secretary of State shall carry out his duty under subsection (1) within one month from the date of the first general election to the European Parliament which takes place after the coming into force of section 1.

(4) The Secretary of State shall lay a copy of any report received under subsection (1)(b) before each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Straw: This is the fourth time that I have had to invite the House to approve the election system for the European parliamentary elections, and the third time that I have had to ask this elected House to override their unelected Lordships.

The arguments against the proposals from the other place are, on their merits, overwhelming; so are the arguments in favour of the closed or simple-list system that we have advanced. The so-called open-list system is not more democratic than the closed-list system, but less democratic. If it were implemented, the result would be anger and incredulity on the part of the electors, directed against those who had instigated it. The electors would feel that an elaborate confidence trick had been played on them. Let me explain why.

The essence of a democratic election system is that those who win the most votes win the most seats: winners win, and losers lose. Under this Conservative system, the winners may lose and the loser may win. The Conservative party claims to support first past the post—it claims to be united on that, if on nothing else. This, however, is not first past the post, but last past the post. Although the proponents of the system on the Opposition Benches here, and in the other place, understand this only dimly, their system is so flawed that a candidate from, for example, the Conservative party who receives 500,000 votes may not be elected, while a candidate from, say, the Liberal Democrats who receives 350,000 votes may be elected in his place. Is that the result that Opposition Members want? Do they understand the nature of the system that they propose? What explanation would they offer their candidates and their party—let alone the public—if that happened? It is the politics of the absurd; and the fact that the Tory party has chosen this of all propositions on which to manufacture a battle between the Lords and the Commons shows the extent to which good judgment has now departed the leadership of the Conservative party.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): If the Home Secretary considers the arguments in support of the closed list to be so overwhelming, why did 36 Cross-Bench peers vote against the Government, and only one with?

Mr. Straw: I must say, with all due respect to the Cross Benchers in the House of Lords, that most of them are also hereditary peers, and I do not believe that they understand the arguments any more than the Front Benchers.

Let us be clear about this. I tried it to help the hon. Gentleman on the last occasion. When Conservative Members engage in complexities, they usually end up making a complete dog's breakfast of their suggestions, and that is what is happening now. The unavoidable truth of the so-called open system that the Conservatives propose is as I have spelt out: candidates receiving more votes may not be elected, while candidates receiving fewer votes may be elected.

Mr. Lansley: Will the Home Secretary give way again?

Mr. Straw: No.

The Conservatives have synthetically manufactured this battle. What gives the lie to their claims that they are defending some grand democratic principle against a dastardly new Labour scheme is the fact that they, as a Government, were the first to use the closed list. I know that they do not wish to be reminded of that—I have watched them squirm every time we remind them—but the system that I am now recommending to the House, for the fourth time, is the same in every particular as the scheme that the Conservatives recommended to this House and the other place in 1996. If the closed-list system is so bad in principle today, why was it not so bad two years ago, when the Conservatives suggested it?

The only excuse to which the Conservatives resort—a threadbare excuse—is that they proposed a closed list for Northern Ireland. What kind of argument is that, especially from a party that was once proud to have "Unionist" as part of its name? The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon

(Mr. Major), did not say that Ireland needed the closed-list system because it had particular problems. Speaking of the very same system that we are now discussing, he said:

"I believe that this is a fair and balanced system that will produce a representative outcome."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 498.]

In Committee on the same Conservative Bill, proposing closed lists, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—the Conservative party's constitutional expert, and its chairman—said:

"The strength of the system that we are proposing is that, for the voter, it requires only one cross to be put against one party. We must make sure that the voter understands that when he goes into the polling booth and is faced with the ballot paper. I think that what we are proposing is the best way to achieve that."—[*Official Report*, 23 April 1996; Vol. 276, c. 283.]

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): The Home Secretary is making a terrible case for his measure—even worse than usual. Does he not concede that the former Prime Minister made it clear that that position was being adopted only in the context of Northern Ireland? *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman laughs. Will he not also concede that his Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition, said:

"As I am sure that the Prime Minister"—

my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—

"would agree, the solution on the election process is certainly not ideal"?—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 279, c. 499.]

Mr. Straw: If the right hon. Gentleman had bothered to read the debate properly, he would know that one of the reasons why my right hon. Friend said it was that what was proposed was a combination of the single transferable vote and the closed list. We never objected to the closed-list system at that stage, and—this is more to the point, as it is they who are now objecting to it—neither did the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues.

What the right hon. Member for Devizes said about the strength of the system as it applied to Northern Ireland must also apply to the rest of the United Kingdom. After all, it is the same system. As I said in the House last week, it is extraordinary that the Conservative party should now propose one of the most complicated of the alternatives—leaving aside its other defects—given that one of its many objections to the Jenkins proposal related to its complexity.

If the right hon. Gentleman will not take advice from me, he might be wise to take advice from one or two of his noble Friends, particularly those who are standing for the European Parliament under the closed-list system. There was a fascinating letter in *The Daily Telegraph* today from Lord Bethell, who was MEP for London North-West until he lost his seat in 1994 under the old first-past-the-post system. He now stands as No. 3 on the Conservatives' closed list, and plainly hopes and expects to be elected. Having gone through a ritual congratulations to the Opposition in the Lords, he said—I quote directly from the letter:

"I wonder, though, if the Conservatives want the elections to be fought on the fully 'open list' system. If so, they will run into problems. The open list offers a choice so wide as to be confusing, especially since hardly any of the several hundred candidates whose names will be put forward have any public profile. Ballot papers will carry 50 or more names. Hardly anyone will know of them. Voters will mark their crosses at random."—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Some hon. Member has an electrical device that is sounding off in the Chamber. Madam Speaker takes an extremely strong line on these matters. Members must either ensure that they have properly switched them off, or leave them outside the Chamber.

7.30 pm

Mr. Straw: You are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to upbraid the Conservative who had failed to turn his pager off. The same thing happened on Second Reading of the Bill on 25 November last year.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman when I have finished reading Lord Bethell's excellent letter. Lord Bethell goes on with this sage advice to his party:

"A change to the open list will also cause conflict between candidates of the same party, who will be competing as much against their colleagues as against their adversaries. One advantage of the closed list is that in London, for instance—where I hope to stand—all 10 of us Conservatives are in the same 'job lot'. A vote for one is a vote for us all."

I would have thought that, these days, some mechanism that ensures some Conservative unity would be welcome to the Conservative party.

Mr. Swayne: My understanding is that Lord Bethell voted against the Government on the issue, but did the right hon. Gentleman see the article on the opposite page by Daniel Hannan, placed fourth in the list for the south-east? If he did not, I commend it to him.

Mr. Straw: I did read Mr. Hannan's article. I have marked it up and have it here. By the way, although I have a high regard for Mr. Hannan, whom I know, he erred. He said:

"In Britain, where democracy preceded parties".

Tories often make the error of believing that the development of representative government that we had in this country over many centuries up to the end of the previous century was democracy; it was not. We did not get around to establishing a properly democratic franchise until this century, so Mr. Hannan, on that key point, is in error.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire): Did the Home Secretary read Lord Bethell's speech of 12 November at columns 862 and 863? If so, he would have recognised that Lord Bethell was not just speaking against closed lists, but recommending a different system.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman shows the degree of confusion in the ranks of the Tory party. I have read out what Lord Bethell wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* today. I assume that, like quite a number of other Conservatives, he now has a touch of the panics. He realises the

[Mr. Straw]

considerable problems that will arise to the Conservative party if the leadership of his party and the Conservative Whips in the other place continue this process.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am listening carefully. I hope that we will not hear too much of Lord Bethell because, although he is a dear man, he once marched around a kibbutz and said solemnly to the young man in charge, "Wouldn't it be better run by private enterprise?" I have never had quite the same faith in his judgment since.

Mr. Straw: None of us will vote for Lord Bethell, even if we are presented with the opportunity to do so, but his words speak for themselves. He makes the point that I have been making to Conservative Members for many months: to have a so-called open list with 50 or more names on the ballot papers, where hardly any of them—says a candidate who is pretty well known himself—is known, will lead to voters marking "their crosses at random".

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am following the Home Secretary's observations with close interest. Is he aware that Lord Bethell, who is an estimable individual, is also a constituent of mine residing in Brill in the Buckingham constituency? Is he further aware that Lord Bethell is a lifelong opponent of centralism and deeply disapproves of the thoroughly undemocratic, Stalinist fashion in which the Labour party wishes to select its candidate for the European elections?

Mr. Straw: My party is a lifelong opponent of centralism as well. We do not need any lectures about centralism from the Conservative party. Some of us remember when the Conservative party was in power, and the Stalinism of Conservative central office knew no bounds.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Does the Home Secretary agree that, under the system that is proposed by the Conservatives in their amendment, the single biggest factor in whether Lord Bethell got elected was whether he was listed as Bethell, Lord or Lord Bethell?

Mr. Straw: That is likely to be the case, but even though Lord Bethell has the advantage of being at the top of the alphabet, a problem from which I have suffered all my life, being near the bottom of the alphabet—look where it has got me—he is firmly against the so-called open list.

The suggestion that the closed list is anathema to our British way of politics is synthetic nonsense. All of us were selected for closed lists—one party, one candidate. That is how it works. A Tory in Sutton Coldfield, a Liberal Democrat in Berwick-upon-Tweed and a Labour supporter in Blackburn have no choice whatever of party candidate. It is take it or leave it. It is no good saying that that is an inherent characteristic of single-member constituencies; it is not. It would be feasible to devise a system for single-member constituencies where each party had to offer two or three candidates, and the voter separately chose the winning candidate from the winning party. Is that what the Conservative party now wants for Westminster? That is the logic of its position.

As to how the closed-list system works out in practice, although we believe—I have made this clear—that it has inherent advantages over any other variant, we do not suggest that this debate should be Parliament's last word on the subject. It was for that reason that, last week, I moved that there should be inserted in the Bill an amendment stating that a statutory review should be carried out into the new system.

I think that that proposal had general approbation, but questions were raised about the review. One was as to who should conduct it. A second was as to whether the review could deal with the principle of closed lists, as well as their operation.

On the first question, I undertake that there will be consultations with the Opposition parties about who should undertake the review. The amendment makes it clear that, formally, the appointment will be a matter for the Secretary of State, but I recognise that the review will be far better if there is agreement on who should undertake it.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): May I re-emphasise the issue that I raised last week on the review? Will there be a role for the Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, because the lists for the European elections are separate? Will there be a determination to ensure that there are representatives of those bodies on that review?

Mr. Straw: I understand the hon. Lady's concern. I undertake to consult her about that. We have not made decisions yet about how many people should conduct the review, but I accept her point that there should be a proper input from Scotland and Wales. I think that the review will have to take place in advance of the formal establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, but I take her point and I hope to meet it.

On the second question, the amendment proposed last week spoke of the "operations" of the new system. I told the House that I took that to include the principle behind the system, but the new Government amendment makes that clear beyond doubt. Subsection (2) states:

"The review shall consider, in particular, how the ability of electors to vote for particular persons on a party's list of candidates might affect the results of an election."

Overwhelming though the arguments are on their merits against the open list, and in favour of the closed list, this issue has now gone beyond that. It is now about Lords versus Commons, about whether a Labour Government, elected just 18 months ago with one of the strongest popular mandates this century, should be blocked from meeting one of their promises to the electorate by a Conservative Opposition who suffered their greatest defeat this century. It is about whether democracy should be defeated by aristocracy—by the in-built majority of hereditary Conservative peers appointed to the other place not because of their own merit but because of the accident of their birth.

I think that the public will find it extraordinary that, for a Conservative party seeking to modernise itself for the next century, Tory Whips in the other place are dragging out hereditary peers to stop the Government securing the clearest of manifesto commitments. For Lord Cranborne

to argue—as he did yesterday—that we did not say exactly which list system we would use is to take sophistry to its extremes. It was highly probable that we would use a system used by most voters in the European Union—the closed-list system—and inherently improbable that we would fetch up with the Conservatives' strange alternative of last past the post. Moreover, I have no recollection of any Tory, at any stage during the general election campaign, ever raising the issue—perhaps because fresh in their minds was the memory that they had used the closed-list system in Northern Ireland.

As long ago as 1791, in "The Rights of Man", Tom Paine said:

"The idea of hereditary legislators is as inconsistent as that of hereditary judges, as hereditary juries; and as absurd as an hereditary mathematician, or an hereditary wise man; as absurd as an hereditary Poet Laureate."

There is no rule of politics or history stating that political parties are bound to survive, however distinguished may be their past—as is the Tory party's. Last Friday, the Adam Smith Institute and MORI published the results of a detailed survey of the attitudes of young voters—of the so-called "millennial generation"—who will reach the age of 21 around the turn of the century. The survey made dismal reading for the Conservative party. Only 12 per cent.—one in eight—of those questioned said that they would support the Conservative party.

If Conservative Members want some explanation of the reason why they are regarded as irrelevant to Britain's future by so many of those who are Britain's future, they need look no further than the unedifying pantomime of their party's behaviour on the Bill, in which they seek to use an undemocratic and unelected institution that is locked in the 18th century to block the will of the elected House.

Sir Norman Fowler: As the Home Secretary said, this is the fourth time that we have debated the subject. I think that everyone who has listened to our previous debates will think that the Home Secretary's speech today is easily the weakest one on the subject that he has made so far. The most extraordinary claim he has made so far is that there are overwhelming arguments in favour of closed lists. The arguments are so overwhelming that he has failed to convince anyone except Ministers. He has certainly not convinced Labour Back Benchers, the press or the public, which is why he was so glad to move on to the party politics of Commons versus Lords, and to get off the substance of this debate.

The Home Secretary seemed to suggest that there was some type of constitutional problem with the Bill. For the reasons that Lord Shore—who is not a Conservative—gave in the other place when he voted once more against the Government, I believe that that is an exaggerated claim. The point that the Home Secretary avoids is that, if there is a problem, the man who is responsible for the problem is the Home Secretary himself. He chose closed-list voting. He cannot shuffle that responsibility on to anyone else. It is because of his blunder and his mistake that we are debating the issue yet again.

The Home Secretary also cannot claim that he was not warned of the consequences of going down the closed-list route. In the very first speech that he made on the Bill, 12 months ago, on Second Reading, he was challenged directly on closed lists. He was challenged not only by Conservative Members but by Labour Members. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) said quite bluntly:

"many of us will not be persuaded by the argument that closed party lists on a regional basis are the right horse for this course."

The hon. Gentleman suggested that it would be appropriate to give the House a choice of proportional systems.

Replying, the Home Secretary said:

"Today we are implementing a manifesto commitment on which all Labour Members stood."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 807.]

However, the Home Secretary knew as well as we know that Labour Members did not have a manifesto commitment on the closed list. Although they had a commitment to proportional representation in the European election, that is not the issue in this debate.

7.45 pm

I make it clear yet again that Conservative Members would infinitely prefer a first-past-the-post system. Much of this prolonged debate has simply confirmed that belief—which I suspect is shared by my hon. Friends. However, that is not the issue in this debate. The Government have forced through the PR system and forced through regional lists. The only remaining issue is whether the public shall have the right to elect their Members of the European Parliament on a named candidate basis—on an open list—or be confined to voting for only one party on a closed list.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Will the right hon. Gentleman say whether he accepts the principle that the closed-list system that the House is considering is identical to the systems used in Germany and France?

Sir Norman Fowler: Even if it were identical to the system used in Germany and France, I am not sure where that would take the argument.

Mr. Caplin: It is the same.

Sir Norman Fowler: Where does that take the argument on democracy in the United Kingdom? If the hon. Gentleman wishes to argue that the system advances democracy, I very much hope that he will make a speech on the subject. I very much hope that he will make a speech on it also because we have not heard one Labour Back-Bench speech in favour of closed lists. We have not heard one serious speech by a Labour Back Bencher in favour of the system. Although I am not sure that a speech by the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) could meet my definition of a serious one, I look forward to hearing one from him, if and when it comes.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Caplin: He has lost the plot.

Mr. Straw: Yes. The right hon. Gentleman should refresh his memory about the debates on Second Reading. My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham,

[Mr. Straw]

Northfield (Mr. Burden), for Stroud (Mr. Drew), for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) and for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) all supported the Bill as published, which included closed lists.

Sir Norman Fowler: I now understand why the Home Secretary is such a good lawyer. It is perfectly true that there were such arguments—I have read them—on Second Reading. It is true also that the Home Secretary won for the Bill a majority of votes on Second Reading. However, can he name one Labour Back Bencher who has spoken in favour of the Government's proposals on closed lists? I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman. The fact is that they all voted, but none of them spoke in favour of closed lists. The Home Secretary is squirming, and he knows that he is squirming. He should perhaps let the debate proceed.

Everyone—regardless of party allegiance—agrees that the closed-list system gives power to the party. It must do that; that is what it is all about. Virtually everyone agrees that, under the system, the Member of the European Parliament will become responsible to the party and not to the public. The whole point of closed lists is to transfer power from the public to the party bosses. However, despite all the arguments, the Home Secretary has persisted in proposing a voting system that has been almost universally condemned in both Houses of Parliament.

As I said, not one Back Bencher—not only in the House, but in the other place—has spoken in the debates of the past two or three weeks in favour of the closed-list system. Even last Thursday, when two or three Labour peers were at last rolled out to support the Government, they were at pains to distinguish their case from the argument on the closed list.

Lord Barnett, in his first sentence in support of the Government, said:

"I should make clear that I prefer the open list system."

Lord Richard, also supporting the Government, tackled the problem in a slightly different way. He said:

"I am not concerned about the issue of open lists and closed lists".

Lord Evans who, in the previous debate, had been an abstaining rebel, this time voted with the Government, but ended his speech with the warning:

"I shall continue to oppose closed lists. I shall take up, through my party's machinery, the absolute necessity of getting rid of the appalling methods we have used to select candidates."

However, he added that that was a matter for future debates, as he sought to explain his change of mind. I watched the debate and was glad to observe from the response that the Lords can spot a bogus reason when they see one.

The debates are positively littered with examples of Labour Members and Labour peers attacking the Government. In the debate to which I just referred—it is only the latest one—Lord Shore, who is not exactly a Conservative peer, said:

"The issue is about the open list against the closed list. It is about an open democratic list against a closed party management list. It is about accountability to the electorate, to the voters, against accountability to a party committee".

Lord Stoddart, who was provoked to speak by Lord Barnett, rather against the interests of Lord Barnett and those on the Government Front Bench, said that he had been accused of being a leading Eurosceptic, which he was, but that had nothing to do with his motives. He said:

"Indeed, as a leading Euro-sceptic, it would suit me very well to support this legislation because it divides and separates even further the Euro MPs from the electorate . . . The fact of the matter is that I believe that this legislation is bad because it removes the link between the electorate and the elected."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 851-61.]

So far, the argument that the Home Secretary believes is overwhelming does not appear to be going altogether his way. Perhaps the press has been kinder to him. However, the leader in *The Times* on Saturday does not lead to that conclusion. It said:

"The Government should not continue to defend the indefensible. There is almost no Member of either House of Parliament who has any sincere enthusiasm for closed lists. It is not enough to conduct a review of a rotten exercise after it has happened. This could only challenge the legitimacy of those who are elected. Mr. Straw should make the most of the unwanted opportunity that their Lordships have thrust upon him. He should drop this dubious proposal entirely."

That is exactly what the Home Secretary should do. The system that the Home Secretary is proposing is basically without friends. We all know that.

If the Home Secretary wants a constitutional issue, I suggest that he examine the speech made in the House on Tuesday last week by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). In taking up the argument of another Labour Member, the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who also criticised the closed list and who I see is in his place, the hon. Gentleman said that his hon. Friend had

"argued, with good grounds, that there is no majority in favour of the closed-list system in the parliamentary Labour party. Yet, he also argued that the Government would have a large majority tonight. I ask the House to think about that contradiction. If there is no majority in the Labour party, but the system is such that the Whips and the Patronage Secretary can dragoon members through the Lobby—and I admit that I will be dragooned when the time comes—what legitimacy does the elected Chamber have in comparison with the unelected Chamber whose Members may, by and large, vote according to their own judgment on the right course of action for the country?"—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 226.]

That was a Labour Member speaking only a few days ago, and surely he asked the question that we should be asking.

We are being asked to accept a voting system that next to no one wants, yet the Government are forcing it through against opinion in their own party, against that of the Conservative party and against the vote in the House of Lords. Let us not pretend that it is a great test of the democratic process. The issue is not the House of Lords carrying out its right and proper function, but Labour Whips forcing support for a voting system which the Labour party, left to its own devices, would reject.

As for the Lords, it is certainly true that hereditary peers helped to vote down the Government amendment, but so did Labour peers like Lord Shore and Lord Stoddart and, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) pointed out, the vast majority of Cross Benchers. I am no more convinced now than I was before that the votes of some of the Labour placemen who have been put into the House of Lords are in some ways superior to those votes. The Home Secretary will find it very difficult to establish overwhelming support for the Government's proposals.

Even a Liberal Democrat broke ranks last week. Up to now, the Liberal Democrats have exhibited what is, even for them, the most extraordinarily pathetic attitude to the issue. They have argued for the open list but voted for the closed list. That is not being cruel—it is simply a fact. To his great credit, Lord Russell this time voted against the Government. He ignored the threat that he would be sacked from the Liberal Democrat Front Bench. As far as I know, he has not been sacked. Of course, it would have been terrible had it happened, but the Liberal Democrats can no more make up their mind about sacking a spokesman than they can about anything else. In any event, it exposes the terrible sham of the Liberal Democrats in opposition, and can be explained only by their new coalition with the Government.

This is the third time that we have debated the amendment regarding the open list and the Government's opposition to it. The Government's latest amendment makes no concession and is not intended to do so. The Home Secretary does not expect us to be persuaded by a review which, by definition, will take place after the European elections. His arguments are increasingly unconvincing, and the most unconvincing of all is that which he uses about the closed-list system in the exceptional circumstances of Northern Ireland.

I took the trouble to confirm the position in Northern Ireland with my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon, the former Prime Minister. He confirms that when it was used for the election for a deliberative forum in Northern Ireland, it was to meet the special circumstances there, and was so explained. That was not what the Home Secretary said tonight.

My point is confirmed by the statement made by my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister on 21 March 1996. Speaking of the list system, he said that the solution was "not ideal". He used those words because the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, had began his questioning by saying:

> "As I am sure that the Prime Minister would agree, the solution on the election process is certainly not ideal".—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 499.]

Yet it is that "not ideal" voting system that we are now to have for the European election. How does the Prime Minister defend that? Apparently, he says that it is simpler. That shows a deeply patronising attitude to the British electorate. It is saying that it is all rather complex for the public, so the Government will help them or, in fact, decide for them.

I am most unconvinced by the Home Secretary's analogy with the election of Members of Parliament to Westminster. There is a fundamental difference. I leave aside cases in which the public have rejected the candidate in spite of the party label or in which people have resigned the party label to challenge the party, sometimes successfully—for example, Dick Taverne. Most of us in this House regard our first duty as being to the public and to the people who elected us. Under the closed-list system, the representatives' first duty can easily become a duty to the party because it is the party that selected them. That is a fundamental difference.

There is one straightforward issue in this debate. It is the difference between the closed list, under which the public vote not for a candidate but for a party, and the open list, under which the public may choose a named candidate who will represent them. That is the choice we face.

The Home Secretary attacks the House of Lords and the role of a second chamber. He is as unconvincing in those attacks as he is in all his other arguments. He avoids the real criticism that the argument against the system that he has proposed is that it is basically anti-democratic. He cannot raise a flag proclaiming "power to the people" when the system that he proposes will give power to the parties. However, he seeks to do just that.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: No, I will not. I am just finishing. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] Well, I will if they wish it.

Mr. Stunell: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. At the start of his speech, he said that he infinitely preferred the first-past-the-post system. Does he accept that if he succeeds in retaining that system for the European elections, there will in fact be a closed list for each individual European constituency?

8 pm

Sir Norman Fowler: That shows the value of giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I shall learn from that for the future. The hon. Gentleman is a bit slow on the uptake so I shall take him back a little. We are not debating the first-past-the-post system.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): Oh yes we are.

Sir Norman Fowler: Oh no we are not. I shall not be rude to the right hon. Gentleman, but he is mistaken. I could put it more strongly than that.

We are debating what kind of voting system will be used under the type of proportional system that the Government are forcing through. Will we have an open-list system, or a closed-list system? I find the attitude of the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) extraordinary, hypocritical and baffling in every way. He argues for an open-list system, but he will vote tonight for a closed-list system. That is the hypocrisy of the Liberal Democrats.

The Home Secretary's proposals take power from the electorate, and give power to the party bosses. That is our fundamental criticism of his system. It takes power from local people, and transfers power to the centre. It is no surprise that the Home Secretary's proposals have been almost universally condemned as there is no serious justification for them. For those reasons, the House should reject the Home Secretary's latest amendments.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I have not participated previously in debates on this matter. I have abstained until now, and I have not voted for the Bill as I think it a very bad Bill. I hope that I can be acquitted of having any sympathy for the House of Lords. To be invited to disagree with the Lords on any matter is to be tempted to do so, but the arguments against the closed-list system are absolutely overwhelming. Indeed, those arguments are the same as the arguments against the House of Lords itself for its Members all got in on a closed list. The Prime Minister draws up a little closed list, and he puts all its members into the House of Lords. If we get rid of the

[Mr. Tony Benn]

hereditary peers, which I would welcome, we shall have nothing but a closed list in the Lords. They will all be the Prime Minister's friends. My objection to the Bill is, therefore, the same as my objection to the House of Lords.

Is there a mandate for the Bill? No one came up to me during the general election campaign to say, "Tony, we will vote Labour only if you promise that we cannot vote for an individual candidate in the European elections." No one said any such thing, and I did not know that that was the policy. I have dealt with many Members of the European Parliament who are conscientious, who work with local Members of Parliament and who become known over a period in their constituencies, although that task is difficult as they cover nine parliamentary constituencies. They go to Brussels and Strasbourg to take up local cases, and they are as conscious of their constituency link as we are. I have reservations about the European Union, but that is another matter. If we must have an EU, and a European Parliament, the best way in which to elect that Parliament is to do it in the way that we do here. People are elected to speak for their constituents, and their constituents can, in the end, dispose of them.

The House will forgive me for quoting five democratic questions that I have developed during my life. If one meets a powerful person—Rupert Murdoch, perhaps, or Joe Stalin or Hitler—one can ask five questions: what power do you have; where did you get it; in whose interests do you exercise it; to whom are you accountable; and, how can we get rid of you? Anyone who cannot answer the last of those questions does not live in a democratic system. I am alarmed that any party should seek to impose candidates.

I served for 34 years on the national executive of the Labour party, and I was often responsible for decisions when contested parliamentary selection conferences came up. The rule that we followed was simple. If the procedure adopted to select a candidate was correct, the national executive always endorsed that candidate.

Mr. Beith: Always?

Mr. Benn: Yes. That was the principle involved. Liberals refer to closed lists under the first-past-the-post system, but the lists are not closed when the constituencies choose the candidates. Candidates are chosen by a selection process within their constituencies. The party should do no more than indicate whether it accepts that that is a valid principle on which to operate.

If we get away from that principle, MEPs will always look to the party leader, not to their constituents. There is a difference between being employed by one person and being employed by everyone. During last week's debate on proportional representation, I drew attention to the fact that we are employed by our constituents, and not by our parties. The idea that Members of Parliament or MEPs are simply local managers for the national party is absolutely contrary to everything for which people fought over many centuries as they argued for representative government.

The Liberal Democrat view puzzles me. That party has always been a great public advocate of being free from party hacks. I know why the Liberal Democrats are accepting the Bill; they have been given a job. I can see members of a Cabinet Committee as I look across the Floor of the House. Part of the deal is that they should go along with the Government, and they will be given a bit of useful work. That is what the whole thing is about, and everyone knows it. No traditional Liberal would look twice at the Bill. Of course, when the Liberal Democrat party was set up, there was a split, and a real Liberal party still exists, which keeps writing to me.

Mr. Beith: A small one.

Mr. Benn: It may be small, but the Liberal Democrat party has had that problem itself on occasion. Better to be small and right, the Liberal party might argue, and I take that view myself.

I believe that the Bill is a test run for parliamentary elections. New Labour—a completely new party, as the Prime Minister has regularly reminded us—has a plan. The new system will be tested in Europe, and applied to the House of Commons. We shall all be worried then, not only about our Whips, but about the leaders of our parties and about our national executive, rather than about our constituents. That would destroy democracy.

One distinct effect would be a much lower turnout. Funnily enough, candidates of all parties become known and quite well liked in their constituencies; they would not be elected otherwise. Parties are not particularly popular. If I go round in the European election campaign and tell people to vote Labour, they may say that they rather like so-and-so. I will have to tell them that they cannot vote for him or her, and must vote Labour. That could well lead to a much lower turnout. A lower turnout undermines the legitimacy of the election process. In a way, I might welcome it if no one voted in the European elections. Part of me might say that that would be an early run of the referendum on the single currency. However, I do not believe in not voting. People should vote.

A further effect will be that Labour will lose a lot of seats. Everyone knows that the closed-list system will give us fewer MEPs than last time.

Mr. Beith *indicated assent.*

Mr. Benn: The right hon. Gentleman is nodding in such a friendly way because he knows that that will happen. We are selling out the party that won the election to other people under a system that has never been specifically endorsed by the electorate.

Mr. Beith: The right hon. Gentleman stood on a Labour manifesto that specified that there would be a system of regional proportional election for the European Parliament. Does he recognise that low turnouts have occurred in previous European elections—particularly the record low turnouts of by-elections—and that the first-past-the-post system simply does not give a fair representation of the votes that are cast?

Mr. Benn: That is a general argument about proportional representation. The idea that every Liberal voter is a Liberal is wrong. To take a case from my constituency, a leading Liberal councillor voted for me because he did not like the Liberal candidate. I rather agreed with him. The Liberals went around the constituency saying that the only way to beat me was to vote Liberal, so the Tories voted Liberal.

To give another example against myself, a man told me after the general election that he had joined the Labour party on polling day. I said, "Fine. Who did you vote for?" He said, "I voted for the Liberals.". The idea that every voter is seeking proportionality is wrong. Every voter is seeking to be represented. The choice may well be a tactical one. I do not have to tell the Liberals that. They have been saying, "Vote tactically", for years, to keep the Tories or Labour out. Occasionally, they have argued their own case as well, although that has never been very successful in the final outcome. I have heard Liberals make the Liberal case; when they make it, I have always found it attractive and historically interesting.

The Home Secretary is in a jam with the House of Lords; they are for the chop, so they have nothing to lose. I was disappointed that we did not abolish the Lords last year in the first Queen's Speech. If we had, we would never have had the problem at all. If the Government had had the guts to deal with the Lords straight away, we could have had an election for the House of Lords by last Christmas and an election of any sort we liked in the European elections. The Government cannot do anything about it.

It does not please me that the Lords are likely to win. I sat through the age of consent debate when the Home Secretary pleaded with the House not to lose the Bill by insisting on an age of consent at 16. He argued that we must face reality. I thought that that was what new Labour was all about. The reality is that if the Lords vote the Bill down next time, we will be back to the old first-past-the-post system. All the lists will be scrapped. God knows what will happen in party headquarters when it is discovered that people can vote for the candidates that they like again. It will cause panic in Millbank tower and perhaps in the Liberal headquarters as well. There is no power for the Government to enforce their will on the Lords because they did not tackle the Lords early enough.

For all those reasons—I know that they are complex—I base myself on the simple principle that democracy will be destroyed if people cannot vote for and remove candidates, and if candidates are simply instruments of whatever may be a party's majorities and machinations when an election comes.

Parties change. I have known parties change from left to right. The Liberal party dissolved itself into the Liberal Democrats; it disappeared. It was one of the most remarkable acts of all time. The Liberals joined up with David Owen, who then voted Tory, and produced a new party. The only person the electors can rely on is the candidate whom they have heard, argued with, listened to, voted for and can vote out. Give that up, and we not only wreck the European elections, but begin to undermine the basis on which this House comes to debate issues and ultimately to decide them.

Mr. Allan: We are grateful to the Conservatives for allowing us such a long and detailed constitutional debate on electoral reform by bringing this measure back to the House so often. It allows us to discuss a subject dear to our hearts that has not often figured in the House until recently.

It is a particular pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who is now an ardent voice in this place for the rump Liberal party. I have sympathy with much of his argument, except that I believe that it advanced a romantic view of the world. The world is not like that these days. For every instance of a person judging between candidates, there are far more of people having to vote for the closed list of one, the single party candidate with whom they are presented. People have to vote for a candidate against their judgment of him because they want to vote for Tony Blair or Paddy Ashdown as Prime Minister.

Sympathy for the arguments of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield leads my party to back the single transferable vote system as our preferred option. The amendment neither meets the Conservatives' wishes nor ours. Our preferred system is used in Northern Ireland in many elections. We accepted the Government's system for these elections with some reluctance; it is not our choice.

We have two fundamental objectives. First, we want to achieve greater proportionality. We believe that one of the best ways to get people to turn out and vote is the knowledge that their votes will matter. To date, Conservative votes in Sheffield have meant nothing in the European elections. We hope that those Conservatives will now vote because they have a chance. The same logic applies up and down the country where votes in the European elections will count whether we have closed or open lists.

The second objective is to increase voter choice. We believe that STV is the best way of doing that. If the right hon. Members for Chesterfield and for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) were standing in the same constituency on a list, voters who wanted to support Labour could vote Labour and number them one and two, according to their shade of opinion in the party. That is our preferred option but it is not on the table.

We have accepted with some reluctance that the system should go forward as it is. Having accepted that, and having argued in Committee for the option that we thought sensible—the Belgian list system—and lost it, we are led to the point that with only a few days of parliamentary time left, we believe that our key objective of achieving fairer representation means that we cannot make further progress on voter choice without risking the Bill running into the buffers. That is the basis on which we have decided to vote.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The hon. Gentleman does not like the choice and would prefer something not on the menu. The Liberals must choose between the two choices on offer, a closed list or an open list. Irrespective of the argument for rushing the measure through, which alternative would the Liberals prefer in the abstract?

8.15 pm

Mr. Allan: I know that the hon. Gentleman is sympathetic to fairer voting systems. In the abstract, we would prefer open lists. I have stated that repeatedly. I have no problem with that but I have one with being drawn into an issue, despite the seductive offers of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), by the idea that because we oppose the Government on this, my enemy's enemy is automatically my friend. In this case my enemy's enemy has an open preference for first past the post. We have to judge whether co-operation furthers our cause of fairer votes or would aid a measure designed to spoil the outcome of the Bill. We have made that judgment and acted accordingly throughout.

[Mr. Allan]

Three main issues have emerged in our lengthy debates. First, the main problems discussed have nothing to do with the principle of whether lists are closed or open but concern the Labour party's selection methods. Many of the quotes in the press and in debates in both Houses—Welsh Members in particular have attended because they have some little local difficulties—have been about how Labour selected its candidates for the European elections.

Mr. Sayeed: Is that not a legitimate concern? That is how the law will operate, and it is perfectly proper to complain about it. If the law allows such operation, it should not be the law.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman makes a case to which I was going to come about how the law is moving forward in respect of selection for lists. The important thing is that but for the problem in the Labour party selection system, we might not have been debating the matter now. If all three parties had had an open selection process based on all their members voting, we might not have been here now because we would all have accepted the system.

The problem is not a fault of the closed-list system per se. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield feared that this is the way that things are going in the Labour party. I suspect that it already is. With any of the systems that we have discussed, a party could impose candidates from the centre. Labour's national executive committee could, if members were foolish enough to allow it the power, impose candidates in every Westminster seat. Candidates would be presented as a closed list of one. It is not the closed list that causes the problem but how parties decide to select their candidates.

Mr. Lansley: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the remedy for the Labour party's method of selecting candidates is through an open list? That follows from his point about voter choice by giving voters the option of choosing between candidates presented by a party list.

Mr. Allan: My second point relates to the specifics of the open list as proposed by the Conservatives and will serve to answer the hon. Gentleman by suggesting that the Finnish system is not the best.

Reference has been made to Lord Bethell, who is himself a candidate. He pointed out not only the specific difficulties of the semi-random or arbitrary nature of the way in which the proposed system would operate, but the practical difficulties in respect of next June's elections if we to make a sudden change. It is quite clear that there would be problems with the Finnish system. My party has a perfect slate of candidates and those at the bottom of the list are just as good as those at the top. Although we would be happy for any of them to be elected, that may not always apply to every list in every region. Given the possibility of a random selection of MEPs on the list being elected, some parties might wish to revisit the list and check who was on it.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I refer the hon. Gentleman to his own party's selection procedure. Is it not the case that the Liberal Democrats use the zipper system which gives undue preference to the smaller number of female candidates who wish to stand as Liberal Democrat MEPs?

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman is straying into a matter of some detail. However, he raises an example of where the open-list system would remove the democratic decision that we made as a party. One of our priorities is to have decent representation of women. The party voted for that and in that sense we are ashamed of our representation here. We wish women to be better represented and we are prepared to take steps to ensure that. That is a perfectly sensible choice given that the party voted for it.

Mr. Benn: If all the Liberal candidates next year are as good as each other, why cannot the electors choose who they want? Is not that the issue? If the hon. Gentleman favours the open list, why will he go into the Lobby tonight and vote for the closed list? If he voted for the open list the matter would go back to the Lords with the Lords' view prevailing.

Mr. Allan: While I believe that any of our candidates would be equally good, the members of my party have decided on a particular order. As they had made a democratic decision, they would wish to revisit it, as would the members of any party, once the system had been changed.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is [illegible] the hon. Gentleman elucidating exactly what is wrong with the system? In Germany, which has already been mentioned, the bizarre situation can arise whereby someone who is thrown out by the electorate can be put back onto the list system. That is quite ridiculous.

Mr. Allan: I would respectfully suggest that the hon. Lady is referring to a completely different system—the German additional-Member system.

To return to the system that we are debating, if we were to proceed with the Conservative proposal, the tacticians within every party would advise withdrawing all candidates except those likely to win. The parties would wish to put forward a slate of candidates that, in our case, had been democratically selected. As Lord Bethell quite rightly said, no party would favour putting forward a random list of 10 or 11 candidates in the south-east.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving way to me again. He keeps talking about a random list. Does he not recognise that the Bill—with the Lords amendment to proposed section 3(5)—would make it perfectly possible for a party to present a list in the order of its own choice, but the voters, by their preferences, could choose to change it?

Mr. Allan: The voters would still be left with the option of simply voting for individual candidates, without the Belgian option of voting for the party's choice.

My third point is that everyone who has spoken so far, including the Home Secretary and Opposition Back Benchers, has highlighted the problem of first past the post being a closed-list system of one and expressed the wish to enhance voter choice—and we agree. However,

the first-past-the-post system, which we believe is the alternative if we are unable to resolve our dispute tonight, would represent a significant step backwards. I hope that the fundamental point made by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield about transferring power from the people to the party is an indication that he now supports some form of single transferable vote.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, under the current system we all owe our presentation to the electorate to our selection by a small group of party members. We do not have a primary system and the voters in our constituencies do not get to choose the candidates for each party. We are often selected by an odd group of party members in a village hall somewhere—I think particul of the Conservatives when I say that. Once we have bee selected, we know that we are the party candidates in a closed list of one.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): It really is nonsense for people to keep talking about a closed list of one. There is no such thing. Closed lists are the opposite of open lists. We cannot have an open list of one, therefore we cannot have a closed list of one.

Mr. Allan: The arguments that are often put forward by Conservative Members suggest that they are moving towards proposing some form of primary, which would effectively be an open-list system of one because a primary system establishes the number one candidate for a party. Their arguments against the current system relate to what happens to those at the bottom of the list, who are in the same position as those who come second or third in a selection battle for a Westminster seat—they are simply unlikely to win.

We believe that the MEP candidates who have been selected by the Opposition parties at least have the endorsement of thousands of their local party members. We should like to extend voter choice and revisit the issue in the review that the Home Secretary has promised. We welcome that review as it will provide an opportunity to argue again in favour of the single transferable vote, which is our first choice of voting system. We do not believe that this is the right time to oppose the Bill or join those who, at this late stage, seek to amend it when, at the appropriate stage, they declined to vote with our Peers in another place for the amendment that would have introduced the far more sensible Belgian open-list system.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): Listening to tonight's debate, one word springs to mind; it is not principle or opposition, but opportunism. The Conservative party has always believed in the closed-list system and only last week told the House of its total faith in the first-past-the-post system. With due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), the latter is a closed-list system because if one wanted to elect a Conservative candidate to Parliament, but had the misfortune to live in Sutton Coldfield, one would have no alternative but to vote for the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). There is no choice of candidate—only of party.

I would be intrigued to hear from Opposition Members whether they would really support an open-list system for the European elections when the likes of Mr. Paul Sykes might provide millions of pounds to campaign in favour of voting solely for eurosceptic candidates. That would wreak complete havoc in those elections. I leave them to dwell on that point. However, I will not deny the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield the opportunity of hearing yet another Back Bencher acknowledge that there are some advantages to an open-list system, provided that it allowed people to tick either the party box or the candidate box—which would not be a truly open system, but a Belgian system—and provided that the voters had the possibility of knowing something about the candidates, which is the case in respect of all those standing in European elections.

Nevertheless, as a Back Bencher, I will give the right hon. Gentleman the rationale for why closed-list systems should sometimes be preferred—there needs to be a separation of power. Parties select candidates and voters elect them. The more say the voters have about the choice of candidates, the less influence they have on the result of the election.

Let me give two simple examples of countries that allow voters to have some say, not only in the election of parties, but in the selection of candidates. The Irish voting system uses the single transferable vote, which allows voters to pick between candidates of Fianna Fail or of Fine Gael and between parties. It has resulted in there being no clear ideological distinction between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, and sometimes between them and the Irish Labour party. That is the result of giving voters the luxury of choosing candidates, which detracts from their power in the choice of parties.

8.30 pm

The second example is that of the United States, which uses the first-past-the-post system, which should meet with the Conservatives' approval. However, it also makes use of primaries, in which voters are able to exercise a choice in the selection of candidates from their own party, and sometimes those of other parties as well—we have all heard of Republican raids on Democratic primaries. What is the result of that system, which allows the voter two bites of cherry, first in the choice of candidate and then in the choice of party? It is that there is no clear difference between the parties; as any textbook will say, there is a huge ideological overlap between Democrats and Republicans. The reason is that, in the desire to give voters more choice, the US system has given them so much choice that it confuses the choice of candidate with the choice of party.

That is the rationale for arguing that open lists can sometimes be self-defeating. They cannot give the voter more choice overall: voter choice is concentrated either on the choice between parties, or on the choice between candidates; and any system that tries to do both confuses the issue.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Is there a single Member of Parliament for any party who stood for election last year on the basis of a closed-list system for Europe?

Mr. Linton: I admire the chutzpah of the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends, who are all totally opposed to any change in the voting system and totally in favour of first past the post, which is a closed-list system. They probably had not even heard of open and closed lists until a few weeks ago, but suddenly

[Mr. Linton]

they are the world's greatest advocates of open lists. Some of them do not even understand what open lists are—witness the fact that they so often confuse the issue of open or closed lists with that of how candidates are chosen.

That is the other side of the coin regarding the rationale for closed lists. If one has closed lists, one must have the candidates clearly selected and ranked by the political parties. That must be done on the basis of one member, one vote.

Mr. Mitchell: I am somewhat confused by my hon. Friend's argument. Like me, he is a supporter of proportional representation, so I cannot understand why he is arguing that the electorate are not intellectually up to the level of decision making exercised by the parties in choosing the lists.

Mr. Linton: As I explained, I acknowledge the arguments in favour of the sort of open lists that were discussed earlier. I am, however, explaining the rationale for closed lists: if people are allowed to choose between candidates, the inevitable effect is to fudge the basic issue of the choice between the parties. I am simply making the point in principle that one cannot give people the choice offered by open lists without detracting from their choice between parties.

As I said, the corollary of that must be that the parties choose their candidates in a democratic way. The issue is quite separate from that of open lists, but the Labour party, which has been mentioned several times, uses panels to rank candidates. That process was described by the general secretary of the party as a transitional system for one election only and I shall be glad to hold him to his word.

There is a specific difficulty facing each of the parties in the coming election: for example, the system offers the Labour party more seats in the south-west, but fewer in the north-west. There was a temptation to manage the transition so that we did not end up with too many of our people representing seats in the north-west and too few in the south-west.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I do not understand the logic of my hon. Friend's argument, or why we need to move Glyn Ford from Manchester to No. 1 on the list for south-west England. I do not perceive the logic in that. The answer to the problem is to allow party members in each region to state their preferences by way of one person, one vote. Will my hon. Friend defend what has happened in Wales, where the person who is third on the list did not receive one vote in Wales? Can he explain why Alec Smith in Scotland, Mike McGowan in Leeds and Christine Oddy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to go on for so long.

Mr. Linton: My hon. Friend anticipates my point. I was arguing against a system whereby a party took upon itself the job of managing the transition. Glyn Ford, who represents a seat in the north-west in the European Parliament, actually comes from Stroud, so it would not have been at all difficult for him to win the selection that he has got—that of No. 1 on the list in the south-west—under a system that allowed the party members to choose democratically. It could have been done democratically, instead of being managed by the party.

I have always said that it is a mistake for parties to get involved in managing the transition. That is nothing new—I told the national executive of my views when it asked for them, and I wrote publicly on the matter at the time. I shall continue to argue that case, but the issue involved is entirely different from that of open and closed lists.

Mr. Llew Smith: We now know the birthplace of Glyn Ford and how that justifies his going to the south-west. Can my hon. Friend now tell me the birthplace of the person who is No. 3 on the list in Wales?

Mr. Linton: I am arguing on the same side as my hon. Friend—in favour of a democratic decision on the selection and ranking of candidates. However, the issue of open and closed lists is quite separate. All the discussion about control freaks, centralisation and party bosses is totally irrelevant to the issue of whether we have open or closed lists.

One of the better aspects of the report of the independent commission on the voting system is that it advocates voting on open lists, but within counties and smaller units. The level at which open lists will work worst is in large regions, where the possibility of voters being familiar with the characteristics and politics of each of the candidates on a long list of up to eleven people is remote.

Mr. Benn: Take an individual candidate—Michael Elliott for London, who has been a Member of the European Parliament for 14 years and who has been put at the bottom of the list. Despite the fact that, in three European elections, the people of his constituency have chosen him to be their MEP, the party machine has put him down to the point where, unless everybody votes Labour, he will not get back. What is the justification for that?

Mr. Linton: My right hon. Friend has mistaken my argument. We are entirely as one on that issue. During the consultation period, I wrote to the NEC to say that the question should be decided by OMOV. What is more, I would chance the view that the members of London voting in a one member, one vote ballot would have resulted in much the same listing as was obtained through the panel. The point is that it should be done in a democratic way. I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend on that point. I am simply trying to make it clear that the issue of how parties select their candidates is totally different from the issue of open or closed lists. Germany, France, Greece, Spain and Portugal use closed lists because they recognise that in European elections, when electoral regions are largest, the open-list system works least well.

I ask the House to see the issues in perspective. We are about to pass a Bill that will bring about a huge change in our voting system and hugely increase the choice for voters. It will mean that Labour voters in Surrey and Conservative voters in Glasgow will, for the first time,

have some chance of having a representative of their own party in the European Parliament. It will enfranchise millions of people in this country.

Mr. Swayne: Has the hon. Gentleman not given the lie to his whole argument by saying that the voter will have, not his representative, but the representative of his party in the European Parliament?

8.45 pm

Mr. Linton: It is about time that hon. Members had the humility to recognise that when the good denizens of New Forest, West put their cross against the hon. Gentleman's name, nine out of 10 are not expressing their personal admiration for him. I am sorry to have to tell him that they are probably expressing a preference for the Conservative party. Although, as I have said repeatedly, it is good if a system allows the voters to have some influence on candidates as well as parties, we must start from a clear understanding that nine out of 10 voters, or probably 99 out of 100, are making a choice between parties and Governments, not between individuals.

Although the issue of whether we have semi-open or closed lists in European elections is important and worth debating, and I have opinions on it, by comparison with the thrust of the Bill it is a tiny issue. This is the Opposition's attempt to stir up the mud to cloud the overall issue.

The parties have 300 candidates in place. The Bill went through the House of Commons last time by a majority of 307 to 125. The system is already used by the major countries in Europe, including Germany, France and Spain. To take opposition any further will merely expose the Conservative party's opportunism. At any time in the past 100 years the Conservatives could have proposed multi-member lists in first-past-the-post elections.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire said that such a system cannot be applied to first past the post. Of course it can. We could easily have more than one candidate standing in the first-past-the-post system and allow the voter to choose between candidates of the same party. We prefer not to do so because it might split the vote, as Conservative Members know full well and they would not risk that. Technically, however, it is perfectly possible. In the past 100 years, the Conservatives have never expressed any interest in or support for open lists.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have been following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest but also with difficulty because he appears to be riding the fence, and that can be very painful. As one of those Members who perhaps falls into the 10 per cent. that he referred to in response to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), can I ask him whether he is trying to enfranchise the people of this country or the political parties and establishment?

Mr. Linton: It is well known that even Mr. Brian Redhead voted across the party divide for the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) because of his admiration for the hon. Gentleman's constituency work. It is sad to say, however, that even allowing for the fact that many people in Macclesfield no doubt admire the hon. Gentleman's work for the local hospital and so on, most of them vote for him because he represents the Conservative party. His Front-Bench colleagues may not agree.

Mr. Mitchell: It might be better if the name of the hon. Member for Macclesfield were not printed on the ballot paper. The logical conclusion of my hon. Friend's argument is that we print only party names, not those of candidates, and we pick the candidates afterwards. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is far too much background noise in the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman who is speaking should be heard properly.

Mr. Linton: My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) knows that it is a dilemma of every electoral system that although we put forward candidates, most people are choosing parties and Governments. Of course it is important to keep the safety valve of having candidates as well as parties, which gives the people the possibility to choose one without the other. However, we must face the fact that under our existing system of first past the post, people must go to extraordinary lengths to remove Members such as the hon. Member for Macclesfield—not that they would want to do so—or the hon. Member for New Forest, West. There would have to be a revolution in the New Forest before so many people swung away from the Conservative party that New Forest, West went Labour. I look forward to that very much but it is unlikely to happen.

Semi-open lists, which we are offered by the Opposition, would make very little difference. The Under-Secretary will correct me if I am wrong, but in all the time that such lists have been used in Belgium, there has been only one known instance of a candidate in a lower position being moved up by the votes that he or she received on the open list to be elected when that person would not otherwise have been elected. There may have been two cases at the very most. The issue is a dot and comma in the electoral system that we are discussing. The House should remember that compared with the issue of whether the Bill is passed, the newly discovered question of open and closed lists, which the Opposition are still trying to get used to, is tiny and should be put in perspective.

Mr. Sayeed: It is customary to respond to the preceding speech, but I found the speech of the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) so confusing and internally contradictory that I do not intend even to try to respond to it.

As this bad Bill has shuttle-cocked between the two Chambers, the same old lags on the Labour Front Bench have made the same old tired and specious arguments. Government supporters have been laggardly in coming forward and supporting what the Government are trying to do. Even the Home Secretary today made a speech that was designed to fill a space rather than make a difference. He repeated the same old canard that the Bill's defeat in the Lords was the fault of those wicked Conservative hereditary peers.

Mr. Caplin: It is true.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Gentleman may learn something if he listens. He seems to forget that 38 of the

[Mr. Sayeed]

53 Cross-Bench peers—I have a list here and I have counted—who voted in a Division on 12 November voted against the Government. More than 70 per cent. of those peers who owe no party allegiance voted against a Government measure because the principle was wrong.

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that in all the three votes on this issue in the other place, the Conservative party's victory—if that is what it is—has occurred because of the votes of hereditary peers?

Mr. Sayeed: The critical point is how those who owe no party allegiance vote, and it is absolutely clear that on 12 November over 70 per cent. of them failed to support Labour's proposals. Indeed, on that date not one Labour or Liberal Back-Bench peer spoke in favour of the Government's measures, just as on 10 November not one Labour Back Bencher made a speech supporting the Government's proposals.

Mr. Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether the measure would have been passed in the other place if the hereditary peers had been discounted?

Mr. Sayeed: That is not the critical point. We must consider how those who owe no party allegiance vote, because that is probably the best way of judging the merits of an argument.

Mr. Beith: I recall that the situation was the same with the poll tax, but I do not remember Conservative Ministers coming to the House and saying, "We are dropping this measure because we have counted the Cross-Bench peers and more of them voted against it than voted for it."

Mr. Sayeed: The right hon. Gentleman should deal with this specific measure, on which his party does not have a very honourable position to defend.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Perhaps I should point out that, if the then Conservative Government had had the common sense to abandon the poll tax because of the result that they achieved in the House of Lords, they might not have got into nearly so much trouble.

Mr. Sayeed: I thank the hon. Lady for her assistance in supporting my arguments.

It is quite surprising that not one Back-Bench Labour peer or Labour Member in this place has spoken in support of the Government's proposals. It is even more surprising bearing in mind the subservient nature of Labour Back-Bench questions and how Tone's clones have been parachuted into the House of peers—not because they have any merit but because they are friends of the Prime Minister. Even they were not prepared to support the Bill. I suspect that that is because this debate is not about closed lists versus open lists—although I believe that open lists are far superior and more democratic.

I believe that not one Labour Back-Bench Member of Parliament or Labour Back-Bench peer is prepared to support this measure because of the way the Labour party intends to operate closed lists. That is the real reason and that is what has really stuck in their craw.

It is worth reminding the House of the speech made by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on 10 November. He said:

"I took part in a vote, with many fellow members of the north Wales Labour party, for those whom we thought should be on the list for the Welsh constituency of five members. We voted for our sitting candidate, Mr. Wilson, by, I think, about 98 per cent, yet, at the last stage, after the matter went into Millbank tower, where heaven knows what happens, a candidate from across the border in England appears on our list in Wales in third position".

The hon. Gentleman continued:

"he came from outside the area and we in Wales had no knowledge that he was interested in being on the list in Wales and he was not considered as one of those in contention for a place on the list by the Labour party members in north Wales. Yet there he is in third position and the candidate for whom 98 per cent. of Labour members in north Wales voted is in fourth position—an unlikely winning position for the Labour party in the elections.

That cannot be right."—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 228.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. *Hansard* is available to every hon. Member, so the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) does not need to read an extract from it verbatim. The hon. Gentleman has made his point and perhaps he should now move on.

Mr. Sayeed: I thank you for your help, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Wrexham—a Labour Member and a former shadow Minister—was making the point that this system cannot be right because it is not open and it is undemocratic.

I think that even the Home Secretary is seized of that argument. I believe that, if the Labour party had chosen the system that we favour, whereby the party membership selects, openly and democratically, both those who should be on the list and the order in which they should appear, we would not have seen this Bill return from the Lords again. However, the Labour party has not done that. Its operation of the closed list is so undemocratic that I consider it an affront to democracy.

Mr. Caplin: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in the south-east—where my constituency of Hove is located—our Member of the European Parliament, Mr. Brendan Donnelly, has been de-selected by his own party not because of any democratic views but because of his views and those of the Leader of the Opposition regarding the single currency?

Mr. Sayeed: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's assistance, but he has got it totally wrong. Mr. Donnelly was not selected by the party members who attended a selection conference. The hon. Member for Wrexham made the point that the candidate in north Wales who received 98 per cent. of the votes was placed in such a low position on the list by the party executive at Millbank that he had no chance of getting elected. That is wrong.

Mr. Loughton: My constituency adjoins that of the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), and I know that almost 2,000 members of the regional Conservative party voted to put that MEP in that position on the list. Does my hon. Friend know how many members of the Labour

party in the south-east region had an opportunity to select the candidates that will appear on the ballot paper representing the Labour party?

Mr. Sayeed: I have not been to Millbank tower, so I do not know whether it is one, two or three apparatchiks. However, I presume that the Prime Minister will decide what the party gets.

I was interested to listen to the Home Secretary's speech tonight, which was surprisingly half-hearted. It was slightly jokey—as most of his speeches are—but it was extraordinarily shallow. I believe that the Home Secretary's heart is no longer in this Bill. His amendments to the Bill are so banal that he must recognise that he has no chance of placating the Lords. I suspect that, after consulting his friends in the parliamentary Labour party, he has concluded that closed lists are undemocratic. He has never been a particular supporter of proportional representation, but he now recognises that this is an opportunity to double-cross the Liberal Democrats. He will not only double-cross the Liberal Democrats by ensuring that we do not get PR for European elections but he will ensure that we do not get closed lists, which his parliamentary party does not want. He will then blame—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is associating the Prime Minister with a double cross. I hope that he is not suggesting that a Member of this place would do anything underhand.

Mr. Sayeed: I am glad to clarify my comments. First, I was referring to the Home Secretary and, secondly, I did not say that he was double crossing anyone. I suggested that he had the opportunity to double-cross the Liberal Democrats—there is a difference.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should make himself clear. I hope that he is not suggesting that any Member of the House would do anything underhand. If he says that he is not trying to do that, I am happy to let him continue.

Mr. Sayeed: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of course I would not even suggest that the Home Secretary would attempt to double-cross any other person or do anything underhand. I am saying that this is a way of getting at the Liberal party. This is a way of preventing PR. This is a way of getting rid of closed-list systems, which he knows that Labour Back Benchers do not like. As he has shown, he is in a position to blame the change of direction on hereditary peers, however erroneously ascribed that blame is.

We know for certain, however, that the way in which the Labour party intends to operate the Bill, if passed, is an affront to democracy. It will allow the Labour party—the Labour party machine—to determine who is elected; and the responsibility of those who are selected and, consequently, elected will be, not to the electorate, but to the Labour party machine.

Mr. Beith: I must be a bit naive. Surely the hon. Gentleman understands that, if he succeeds and the Bill fails, first, more Labour MPs will be elected than under the present system, and secondly, it will be open to the central machinery of the Labour party, through the selection panel system, to ensure that only those that it wants are elected. Therefore, the results that he fears will happen in much larger measure if he succeeds in killing the Bill.

Mr. Sayeed: That casts some light on why the Liberal party, having said that it wants open lists, now says that it wants closed lists, but the right hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. I believe that, as the people realise how much contempt for democracy is revealed by the things that the Government are trying to do, they will demand of the Labour party more honest, more open selection and election procedures.

9 pm

The Bill may have a quixotic result. I believe that it has emboldened the House of Lords and enhanced its legitimacy. The Bill has shown the need for an independent second chamber. I believe that it will make the Government's life more difficult, and I am delighted with that.

Mr. Mitchell: I have previously abstained in Divisions on this measure. It was the most difficult form of abstention, because I always come along to abstain in person. I shall now air my indecision by giving the arguments for the abstention, although my indecision is less decisive than the indecision of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan).

At this stage in what looks like a futile argument, we need a futile gesture, because what is going on is a battle of prehistoric monsters—a virility contest between the Government and the House of Lords. I am too old to be into virility contests. I am a safe pair of trousers, of course—we all are, on the Labour Benches—but I am not a virility contest person. In this eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation—it is pink eyeball to pink eyeball, one from principle and the other from port—neither side is effectively right.

I am the biggest fan of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I hope that the Under-Secretary will transmit that message to him; it might do me good. The Home Secretary chose the worst possible form of proportional representation—which I support—for the Bill, perhaps deliberately, in the hope of discrediting proportional representation; whereas the House of Lords is kicking over the traces on behalf of the Conservative party, which does not want any PR at all, in the hope that the Conservative party will go out on a limb and support the hereditary peers. The Lords are scratching the back of the Conservative party by doing what they believe will please it—making a nuisance of themselves for the Government.

It is an argument in which neither side is right, and it is depressing in the extreme to watch the battle of mastodons going on at the expense of the European elections next year. The Government's majority is in single hundreds, it is true; we do not yet have total control, as we shall eventually, but we have a majority to do anything, and the hereditary peers are just having a bit of fun—a last fling before extinction. It is not really Lords versus Commons; it is the hereditary peers versus the hereditary believers in first past the post. Most MPs believe in first past the post because they believe that any system that elected them must be the wisest, most effective system available.

[Mr. Mitchell]

It has been suggested to me, in the friendly discussions that one has with Whips—I am a big admirer of my personal Whip—

Mr. Benn: Put him on the list.

Mr. Mitchell: Perhaps they will put me on the list.

It has been suggested that I should regard this as a battle between Lords and Commons, and that I could do myself a bit of good by voting with the Government this time. *[Laughter.]* Labour Whips do give us helpful advice; that is what they are there for. As Opposition Members are laughing, I want to make it clear that the Labour party is not a party of control freaks—I am authorised to say that.

We should therefore decide on the basis of the argument, but the argument has been extremely confusing for someone like me. I always admired the Liberals as men and women of principle—a party of principle—but after admiring them for that for 18 years, it is terrifying to see how cheap they come now. We used to say in the back row of the Glenroyal cinema in Shipley that some girls were easy and some girls were not. The Liberals are easy: a few crumbs from the table of power, and they will throw away their principles on terrorist legislation, on proportional representation and on open lists. That is cheap.

I want the same thing myself. I would like a bit of power too, so I can understand the Liberals taking that approach. My friends, my fellow executives of the Labour campaign for electoral reform, in which we have all fought together, will tonight take a firm stand and say that we shall hold the Government to the review. We shall be really tough about the review, after the election is over.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) has confused me with the argument that we should have closed lists because the people cannot judge, except on a party basis, but that the parties should choose on the basis of one member one vote. They have not done so, which to my mind destroys the argument for closed lists. I could not follow that argument.

Mr. Linton: My hon. Friend has a short memory. I said at the beginning of my contribution that I would prefer an open-list system, but I gave the rationale for a closed-list system.

Mr. Mitchell: I had not understood for the wrong reasons. Now I do not understand for the right reasons. I am much happier with that situation.

There is one simple principle on which we should judge the argument between a closed list and an open list, which is that the electorate will resent having a closed list imposed on them. They will resent not being able to make any choice at all. It is not a burning issue. Most of them will not bother to vote in the European elections. They will stay a mile away, and rightly too. European elections are boring.

If voters are told that they do not have the power to choose, they will mostly vote on party lines. I am sure that they will want to vote for us—we are extremely popular, we are a good party, and we have a leader who throws his cloak over the whole party. We shall do well in the elections, but we are telling the electorate that they cannot make any choice—they must vote as the party wants them to vote.

That will produce a festering resentment, which will do us no good. It is a basic flaw in democracy. We cannot say that to the people. We should maximise choice. They will resent it if they feel that they cannot pick and choose within the list when they know enough about the candidates to pick and choose.

I have aired my agonising indecision. I shall leave the Chamber for a little while to commune with destiny. I shall be sitting in the Cafeteria downstairs, eating my sausage and mash, and awaiting offers. After 18 years in futile opposition, I would like a bit of power. My ambitions are higher than those of the Liberals, because I want to be a PPS. I intend to contemplate my vote, eat my sausage and mash, and hope that somebody comes down to see me.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am glad that there is no ruling from the Chair that we are not allowed to be amused by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). He made the speech by the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) look no better than it was when we first heard it, and he has made the speech by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), which looked good by comparison with the speech from Battersea, look not quite as good as it did after we had heard only the latter.

We have heard from hon. Members that the voting system is a bit of fun, that it is a tiny issue, that being able to vote for an individual is something to do with a safety valve, and that it is a dot and a comma. It will be the first vote in this island in which not a single voter will vote for a single candidate, and not a single candidate will receive a single vote from a voter. That is more than a dot or a comma.

It is also worth noting that the Government would intend that in most cases there would not be by-elections. If that applied to this House, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby would never have been chosen by the control freaks to stand in general elections. His constituency party was looking for someone in a by-election to hold a seat that it thought it might lose. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) was another by-election entrant, and so was I.

One of the disadvantages of a party-list system, or even of the big multi-constituency system, is that we begin to lose the opportunity between elections of understanding what the voters are thinking. I shall give one example from outside my constituency at a local level. Even though the Labour party is apparently standing with more than half the popular support, it cannot put up candidates in many of the south-coast by-elections. When one considers the swings from the Liberal Democrats, say, to the Tories in the area which I represent in part, real votes being counted encourages putting forward good candidates whom the voters like and tells us something about the way the wind is moving between the parties.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said, we are not now debating whether to have the first-past-the-post system in single-Member constituencies. The Bill is not about that. The test is the simple one of why, when the

Prime Minister last Wednesday defended the closed-list system, not one of the independently minded Back-Bench Labour Members nodded agreement to what the right hon. Gentleman was saying.

If there were a secret ballot among Labour Back Benchers to give them the choice of an open system or a closed system, the vast majority would vote for an open system. If they were given a free vote, they would vote for an open system using their own names on the Division list. Instead, they are being told by their Whips to support the closed-list system for reasons which most of them do not understand. Perhaps we cannot assume that, because most of them are not speaking; but those who have spoken have shown that they do not understand. They have said clearly in most of the arguments that they would prefer to have an open-list system.

The Liberal Democrats have said that they would prefer to have more of an open-list system, which is why they will vote with Labour Back Benchers for something that they do not want. If the choice is, as the Lords Labour Minister said on the radio, whether one wants to vote with the hereditaries for what Labour Back-Bench Members want or to overturn their judgment and, for example, stand with cross-Bench Members of the House of Lords, I would go on the whole for those with some degree of independence rather than for those being controlled by the Whips—however engaging the Government Whips might be.

I suggest an extra question that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) might consider. His first five questions are good ones but I suggest that the sixth might be how much power we give to a few people. At present, I believe that the Labour Whips—I use them as a sort of cloak for the people round the Prime Minister—have too much power. They have persuaded Labour Back Benchers to vote for something in which they do not believe. They have also managed to persuade the Liberal Democrats to vote for something in which they do not believe either.

If the Government do not insist on having closed lists, that will be good for democracy, good for the House and good for the country. It might even start a tendency for those in other parts of the European Union to say, "Why don't we go more to smaller constituencies than, in some cases, the whole nation; why don't we go for smaller constituencies than the multi-Member mammoths?" We are facing multi-Member mammoths in this country.

There has been talk of the various ways of selecting candidates and where they stand on the list. I think that the Tory party has the best system of the three parties but in my view it is still a bad system. It would be far better to have Members of the European Parliament representing areas where they have a chance of getting to know the people and to be known by the people. That would be far better than having nine, 11 or even five Members for the same area.

I believe that when historians of politics write up this period they will say that what the Labour Government were doing was wrong. For those who have any sense of independence—I include the hon. Member for Great Grimsby in that category—I have some advice. If I were the hon. Gentleman I would return from my meal and, instead of being like a poached egg on a fence, vote for what the majority of his colleagues want. The hon. Gentleman's Labour colleagues will not vote for the open-list system but he should.

Mrs. Dunwoody: When I was a Member of the European Parliament, one of the constant arguments between myself and other Members of the socialist group arose from their saying that we should have proportional representation and a list system. Their constant complaint was that the British were the only people who did not have the name at the top of the list of a very well-known socialist politician. They said that that was the only way in which they were able to obtain any sensible vote. They asked why we could not at that time have someone such as the gentleman they called "Nail Kinnock" at the head of our list.

I had some difficulty explaining to them that even the most inadequate of our elected Members had a direct connection with the area which they were elected to represent. That was something that they found extremely difficult to understand. Having worked for many years on the continent, I understood their confusion: their system has always been party-controlled and party-based. For example, the Dutch system has both religious and political divisions, so I was one of the first people to work for both a socialist and a Catholic radio station.

The link between voting for a person and voting for a candidate is important. We are all here because of our commitment to our party. I have been a member of the Labour party since I was 16 years old, although I sometimes wonder which Labour party. The other day, my lovely Deputy Chief Whip suggested that I had one of my own, which was a bit rotten of him.

9.15 pm

Although we are all here because of our party connections, in our system of government people connect parties with individuals. Individual Members of Parliament take the flak in their constituencies for the views of their party, and take their constituents' views back to the elected Chamber. They have a direct link with a geographical area, and are regarded as the representative of that area. It would be a dire day if we were to lose that.

I have argued about this matter within my party, and I understand those who said that, because an undertaking was given many moons ago that we would move towards the same system as the rest of Europe—this is really all about conformity of electoral systems—we would have to come up with a system that was different from the one that we operated. I was prepared to argue about that, but I lost the argument within my party.

I have grave reservations about the idea that, in the final analysis, the electorate should not be given the ability to decide their own candidate. That is why I have abstained on this Bill. Candidates come in all shapes, sizes and types—some admirable and some not quite so admirable, some well known to the electorate and some building a reputation.

My objections to the Bill do not stem from the Labour party's behaviour. The Labour party has got itself into a hole, which is not altogether unusual in my lifetime, and I should like it to stop digging. If it persists, I simply want to put it on the record that I firmly believe that, when the electorate vote for me they show great intelligence, ability, understanding and sensitivity, whereas, when they

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

vote for anybody else, they show a great inability to understand political issues. The reality for politics in this country remains that the electorate should decide.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman—I mean hon. Lady—give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am very fond of the hon. Gentleman. If he has not yet learnt that I am not a man, we are in trouble.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's tolerance. Will she be frank enough to admit to the House that, two or three elections ago, she should have lost her seat, because, in normal circumstances, the swing would have had her well defeated in Crewe and Nantwich? However, I am happy to say from the Conservative Benches that, because of the respect in which she is held as a result of the wonderful work that she has done for her constituency since she was first elected, she won the seat. Does she believe, as I do, in trusting and respecting people because they know what they are doing?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I frequently explain to people that my constituents may say, "She is an unfortunate person with unmarried parents, but she is our unfortunate person with unmarried parents." That is quite important in elections.

I feel very strongly about this matter. I speak tonight not because I believe that we are being asked to choose between an inadequate system and an even more inadequate system, but for a very different reason. I saw the effect of list systems on the European Parliament and the control that all political parties exercised. I explained time and again—wrongly, it now appears—that we would find it difficult to accept that system in Britain, because we had a genuine commitment to a constituency link and we believed that the individual was tremendously important in our system of government. I believe that very strongly.

I shall not vote tonight, which is unusual for me, because it is the coward's way out. I want to record my deep worry about the breaking of that link. Whatever we think of the electorate, on the whole they come up with sensible results. Sometimes I like the results, and sometimes I hate them, but I support the right of the electorate to decide those results.

Mr. Loughton: This has been an entertaining debate, which has often been about something else, but the issue that we should have been debating—put in its simplest terms—is the people's choice against the party's choice.

Despite the constant debating of the subject, wherever I speak to well-informed people, I am amazed that the vast majority are blissfully unaware that they will not be able to vote for the candidate of their choice when they go to the polls at the European election next June. There is enormous ignorance of the reality of what is being debated and of what will result if the Bill is passed in this form.

People in this country like to think that they have some control over the candidate who represents them, that they have a link with that representative, that they know their representative's name, and that, if push came to shove, they could speak to, or get rid of, that representative.

That may be a slightly rose-tinted view of the way in which our democracy works, but most British people take comfort from that state of affairs. Suggesting that they are not up to the job of selecting their first-choice candidate to represent them—in Europe, in Wales, in Scotland or in Westminster—shows utter contempt for the ordinary people of this country.

The Home Secretary argued on numerous occasions that all that is pointless, because candidates will be virtually anonymous in these huge European regions, and are virtually anonymous as Members of the European Parliament for the smaller constituencies at present, but that they will be wholly anonymous in a constituency which—in my part of the country, for example—will encompass 5.9 million people and elect 11 representatives. Goodness knows where someone will go for a surgery to see one of the MEPs in such a large area.

That is a fallacious argument, however: it suggests that, because they will be anonymous, we may as well condemn all MEPs to a lifetime of anonymity through being a person on a closed list. That will not improve the turnout at European elections, which has been the raison d'être for reforming the system. It will make people feel more detached and more remote from their MEP, whom they could not vote for as a person.

As many hon. Members have said, the problem is that many of the least anonymous candidates in the Labour party tend to be those who are most out of line with Millbank tower, which is what the argument is about. The closed-list system is designed entirely to suit the internal machinations of the governing party.

We have heard about the strange goings on behind closed doors in respect of the Welsh list, after which the top candidate chosen by members of the Labour party in Wales mysteriously dropped well down the list. A small number of regional representatives and members of the Labour party national executive committee decided who went on that list and in what order.

Do I detect a small chink in that control freak mentality, at least in Wales, with the story that the members of the Labour party in Wales may get one person, one vote, to select the leader of the Welsh Assembly, should he or she happen to be a member of the Labour party? If that is the case, it is a welcome development, albeit late in the day. It follows the example set by Conservative Members many months ago, when we went for one person, one vote. All the candidates on Conservative party lists up and down the country were selected under a system whereby every member of the Conservative party in each region had the opportunity to cast an equal vote for a candidate to decide where on the list they were placed.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that is nonsense? In my part of the world, members from Berkshire had to travel to a caucus meeting in docklands to deselect their MEP. It was not one member, one vote. Only one party has offered that system: the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Loughton: If the argument in favour of the legislation is that a bus journey to docklands is too far, that is a fairly sorry state of affairs. It was not a caucus meeting; every paid-up member of the Conservative party in the south-east region was able to attend the meeting and cast an equal vote.

I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will reply to the question I posed earlier. How many members of his party had an equal vote in the selection of the Labour party candidates who will be set against the Conservative party candidates in my region? Can we count them on one or two hands? We cannot count them, because we do not know who selected those candidates, how many people made the selection and on what basis. Perhaps they used a ouija board. Did they get pager messages from Millbank tower? Did the Prime Minister appear and say, "These are the people I want to appear on the list"? We do not know.

The Labour party has dismally failed to tell us how it selected its candidates. How Labour Members have the audacity to claim that they have a better system than the wholly democratic one person, one vote system used by the Conservative party beggars belief.

Mr. Allan: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman took part in the democratic exercise to select his party's candidate. I hope that he will confirm that the Conservatives have selected candidates who will serve the public in a genuine spirit of public service, and not be merely party hacks. Some of the tone of the debate is insulting to candidates, because it suggests that they will have no notion of serving the public in their larger regions. That is not true in the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Loughton: That is a bit rich, given that the Liberal Democrats used a hybrid zipper system to choose a small number of female candidates. They feel guilty because they so dismally failed to get many female MPs elected at the last general election *[Interruption.]* The Conservative party made no pretence about trying to fix the list. In the London region, a woman who is certainly no party apparatchik came top of the list, and good luck to her. Her name is Villiers—I shall give her that extra bit of publicity to promote her chances at the election next year. There was no prospect of party apparatchiks getting any favours. In fact, the list shows that the opposite was true.

It is appropriate that, on 6 December, we celebrate—or perhaps do not celebrate—the 250th anniversary of Pride's purge. Under Cromwell, Members of the House who happened to be out of tune with the Commonwealth Government of the day mysteriously disappeared from these Benches. We have a lesson to learn, because, 250 years on, history seems to be repeating itself on the Labour Benches.

I return to this little chink of light. On 12 November 1997—a year ago—the Home Secretary said:

"We are a party and a Government who listen to argument."

Let them prove that this evening. They have repeated the absurd suggestion that all will be well because we will have another review. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, the review will take place after the changes have happened.

Can any Labour Member name a European country that changed its electoral system and six months later had a review about changing it back? It does not happen like that. The right thing to do would be to keep the status quo until next year's elections, and then review it—if that really is the Government's intention.

It is absurd to insist on a closed-list system that, in the end, would probably make little difference to the way in which party votes fell. Moreover, there is no need to fall into line totally with other European states for the purpose of these elections. There is a multiplicity of different electoral systems. As I have said, we do not even have a commonality between the parties in regard to the way in which candidates are selected—although, if we are a progressive House moving towards more democratic accountability, I expect that the Conservative model will be emulated by all the other parties.

9.30 pm

Another absurdity is that the Labour party's manifesto at the last election expressed no preference for a particular type of proportional representation. Labour cannot even claim that it is only living up to its manifesto commitments—although we know that it is not very good at doing that, anyway. Besides, the proposed system goes against the Jenkins report. Conservative Members disagree with the thrust of that report, but the one thing to which it holds dear is an open-list system and some contact with the individual Member. That, at least, Lord Jenkins has tried to preserve.

The truth is that this whole debate has become a convenient way of bashing the House of Lords, just as foxhunting was some months ago. In fact, the noble Lords are doing their job, and doing it rather well. They have been representing the views of the electorate rather closely—on student tuition fees, the age of consent and, in this instance, the people's right to vote for people, not parties. But, if we are to accept what we are being fed by the Government, their Lordships have already been dismissed. They have already been summarily executed.

Labour Members might do well to listen to some of the wise words that were spoken in the House of Lords just a few days ago. Lord Shaw said:

"So the argument that it is simply a matter of elected Commons versus unelected Peers and that the unelected Peers, because they are dominated by hereditary Conservative Members, should always be brushed aside, is not in itself strong enough."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 851.]

He is right. The idea that anything said in the House of Lords does not matter is absurd. It is ironic that the unelected Lords should be most in tune with the democratic principles that are held dear by the majority of democracy-loving people.

It is time to show that the Home Secretary does listen, not just to the majority in the upper House but to the silenced voices on his own Benches, and elsewhere among the majority of his own party members in the country at large.

Mr. Barnes: I wish to make only two brief points. One relates to the peculiar argument advanced by the Home Secretary and Liberal Democrats, that there can be such a thing as a closed list of one. I accept that one person can be foisted on the electorate, just as a list of people can be foisted on the electorate. They can be foisted by a decision of the party—by one member, one vote, or what you will—or by the bureaucracy of the party. Both lists and individuals can be foisted on people who will not have much choice if they want to vote for the party concerned.

The phrase "a closed list of one", however, is very odd. I do not have a very good memory, so when my wife sends me shopping, she gives me a list. Even my memory, however, is not so bad that my wife will give me a shopping list containing only one item. I therefore found it strange that an argument should be advanced whose aim

[Mr. Barnes]

seemed to be to confuse the two systems. It is not logically possible to have a closed list of one. It is neither false nor true to say that it is possible; the idea is simply *meaningless nonsense.*

A closed list means something in comparison with an open list, and there is no way in the world or in logic that we can have an open list of one. As we have agreed, one candidate can be foisted on people whatever the method that has been chosen, so I hope that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Liberal Democrats will stop speaking in ways that are entirely meaningless. If they mean to say something else—this is the point that I first made—about it being possible for people to be foisted on the electorate, whether as individuals or as candidates on the lists, they should say that, but they should not try to invent a type of language that finishes up saying nothing.

Mr. Allan: Aside from the semantic argument, we are simply trying to make the point that there would be an alternative, and it is the logical outcome of that proposed by the proponents of the amendment. To follow the same logic that they are using in this debate, in first-past-the-post elections, each party should put forward a list of several candidates, and the highest one should get selected. I apologise for any semantic confusion that was caused.

Mr. Barnes: It is a matter not of semantics, but of meaning. I do not think even politicians should say things that are meaningless, although they happen to feel that they say something. It may be that, in the era of spin doctors, we are given to that, but we should be considerably aware of it.

My second point is about why I am abstaining on all this to-ing and fro-ing with the other place. It is because I oppose lists, whether they are open lists or closed lists. I agree that a closed list can emerge because it has been democratically determined by membership within a party, by delegatory or by individual vote means; it can also be foisted on people.

Nevertheless, a closed list is presented to people, and there is no opportunity to make any choice between the half dozen or so candidates that are presented. However, if we had an open list and we could choose between the half dozen, that would produce other problems. As occurs with the single transferable vote system in the Republic of Ireland, members of the same political party would be in contest with one another to get higher up the list and to get the vote compared with someone else.

I do not think that that is a good thing for political parties, or for democracy generally. We can fight each other enough within the Labour party without organising it for electoral arrangements. Why should we institutionalise conflict? The conflict that the Conservative party had, and still has, over Europe—why should we extend that to the ballot box, to allow the choice then to be made by the electorate in going for one person or another? It is a matter that the parties need to sort out by their different representatives as to what their general position is, which they should then put before an electorate.

Therefore, I do not like lists. There are other forms of proportional representation in which lists are not things that are put to the electorate. Lord Jenkins' report refers to a system that the Hansard Society suggested on one occasion, that of the fastest loser. We can top systems up out of the votes that have taken place in constituencies by the people who came nearest to taking those seats in the election.

Something like that might be possible. It does not refer to the situation that is before us now, because we have no choice. Those of us who dislike this type of proportional representation, or think that first past the post is better than some other forms of proportional representation, have nothing else to do in these debates but to continue abstaining in a principled way—something that the Liberal Democrats used to know about at one time.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) may have struck a chord with the House—perhaps he will also with future electorates and Labour party candidates—by being so confident as to say that he, like other Labour Members, will abstain in today's Division. If a closed-list system were ever introduced for elections to the House, I am not sure that they would feel quite so confident in making such a statement.

The Government are today stuck between a rock and a hard place. The rock is the open list, and the hard place is the current first-past-the-post system. The Home Secretary said that Conservative Members should follow Lord Bethell's advice, which was published in an open letter in today's *The Daily Telegraph.* I wonder whether the Home Secretary and other Ministers would like to follow the advice given by Mr. Henry McCubbin—who was the former Labour Member of the European Parliament for north-east Scotland from 1989 to 1994—in a letter to my noble Friend Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish.

Mr. McCubbin wrote to Lord Mackay—the letter was used last week in a debate in the other place—that Rule 2 of the European Parliament's rules, under the heading "The independent mandate", clearly states:

> "Members of the European Parliament shall exercise their mandate independently. They shall not be bound by any instructions and shall not receive a binding mandate."

Therefore, that honourable gentleman, who—in his own rather eloquent words—had dropped out of the "comfort zone" and been excluded from the closed list, would stand to gain quite substantially if the House votes, and the other place continues to vote, for an open list system.

Mr. McCubbin wrote to my noble Friend Lord Mackay simply to say:

> "To my mind the open list is the only way to meet this simple but important criteria",

and has written to the Lords to

> "support the Lords amendment to provide for open lists"—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 12 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 849.]

in the hope that sufficient peers would follow that suggestion.

I am one of only three dual mandate Members and, on personal experience, can put Ministers' minds to rest on the matter of voter recognition, which certainly exists. On leaving this place and arriving on a train, at 12.30 in the morning, at the constituency of the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell), I was picked up by a taxi driver who was rather concerned that I had nowhere to stay that night. However, when I assured him that I was not only the Member of Parliament for the Vale of York but a

Member of the European Parliament for that constituency, he got part of my name right and called me Anne. He could not quite get the second part of my name right, but then he was not voting that night.

If a taxi driver in Colchester town knows who his MEP is, that is good enough for me.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has struck a chord with the House today. We know that the only beneficiaries in the House today are the Members of one small group—the Liberal Democrats—and that the proposals are the prelude for proportional representation being introduced, perhaps on a similar basis, for elections to the House.

If first past the post has been and still is good enough for this place, why should it not be good enough—as it has been since 1979—for electors to the European Parliament? What are Ministers so afraid of? They speak so often of Labour being the people's party and of creating a people's Britain. This is the one occasion on which we can allow voters to make the people's choice. Let the people choose.

It is not really a question of the Lords versus the Commons. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) said today, throughout this whole experience—my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) called it "the shuttlecock procedure"—the Lords have been more in tune with voters than Ministers have. Ministers are so out of tune on the matter, that, on reflection, they may want to leave the rock and the hard place and join Conservative Members in voting for nothing more simple or clear than an open list. As the Lords stated, electors should be able not only to vote for a party but to state their own personal preference of candidate. Let the people decide.

9.45 pm

Mr. Stephen Twigg (Enfield, Southgate): We have heard a great many romantic notions from Conservative Members about the present set-up. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) was identified late at night, at least by her first name, by a taxi driver in her European constituency.

Listening to Conservative Members, one would believe that this country had the highest turnout in the European Union at the European elections, rather than one of the lowest, and that everyone knew the name of his Member of the European Parliament. I would stick my neck out and say that the majority would not know the name of their Member of the European Parliament. I would make an exception for my own excellent MEP, Pauline Green, the leader of the Socialist group in the European Parliament. I am delighted that she is also No. 1 on the Labour list for London, and look forward to her continuing to represent the people of my constituency in the European Parliament.

I shall concentrate on three points. First, it is worth reminding ourselves of the Bill's purpose, which is to give fair representation to voters across the country. I contest the view that the beneficiaries of the proposed system will be any one political party. I think that the beneficiaries will be voters who do not currently have a voice in the British delegation to the European Parliament, whether they be Liberal Democrat voters in Greater London, Labour voters in many of the home counties or Conservative voters in Scotland and Wales. The Bill deals with what the Jenkins report identified as electoral deserts, which are those large parts of the country where significant groups of voters have no representation. It is for that reason that the Bill should become law as soon as possible.

Secondly, when we debated the Jenkins report in the House a couple of weeks ago, hon. Members of all parties accepted that there is no such thing as a perfect voting system. Every voting system has its advantages and disadvantages, and we should bear that in mind tonight.

Thirdly, at an earlier stage of our consideration of the Bill, we considered proposals, put to us by the Liberal Democrats and endorsed by organisations such as Charter 88, for a partial open system—the so-called Belgian system. Many of us felt that that option had merits, and said so in this place and elsewhere. Unfortunately, we did not proceed with that proposal. I welcome the Government's proposal for a review, which will enable us to consider the issue again after the elections.

Mr. Lansley: Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that, should the Government choose to do so, they could, with their order-making powers, get something very close to the Belgian system by using the open-list system set out in the Lords amendment?

Mr. Twigg: That point was not made by the hon. Gentleman or any of his colleagues when the proposal was before the House. The hon. Gentleman's proposal and that being considered now are very different. The Lords proposal is essentially a wrecking amendment from people who want the first-past-the-post system to be retained in the European elections.

I want to take up the point about closed lists of one. It is appropriate to talk about the first-past-the-post system as a closed list of one. The purpose of an open list is to enable the voter to have a choice of different candidates, including different candidates from the same party. The argument against a closed list is that it does not give that choice. For example, a Labour voter in my constituency who does not want to vote for me either has to vote for me with gritted teeth or does not vote Labour. It is therefore perfectly legitimate to argue that we have a closed system with first past the post.

Mr. Barnes: Will my hon. Friend say how we could have an open list of one?

Mr. Twigg: Of course we could have a system whereby the parties offered a range of candidates and the voters were allowed to decide among them. The logic is the same as that deployed by those arguing for the Lords amendment. *[Interruption.]* I am being asked to wind up so I shall do so.

We have an opportunity to pass a Bill that will be an important part of the Government's constitutional reform programme. We have an undertaking in the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that there will be a review and that Opposition parties will be consulted. That should be welcomed. The House of Lords has had its chance. The will of the House of Commons should prevail. The Bill is a significant democratic reform, which I hope will be supported by hon. Members of all parties.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): We have had a good debate, and a good-humoured one. We have gone over well-trodden ground, but we have once again heard widespread concern about and hostility towards the Government's proposal for a closed-list system. It is striking that the hostility has become greater and greater during debates on this matter, not least on the Government side of the House. We have heard hon. Member after hon. Member speak with great feeling against the closed-list system and in favour of the principle of the open-list system. I have listened carefully tonight to each speech from the Labour Benches, and not one of them favoured the closed-list system in principle over the open-list system.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) gave a speech that the House enjoyed. He set out his five principles of democratic choice, as he put it, and it was clear that the system proposed by the Government did not fulfil any of his criteria. In particular, he rightly said that it is impossible under a closed-list system for a voter to use the ballot box to get rid of a Member of whom he or she disapproves.

I thought that the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) would be a supporter of the closed-list system when he began to speak. However, he said, during his speech and in clarifying an intervention later, that he favoured the open-list system over the closed-list system. His logic was not entirely clear, but I do not want to be unfair to him. I did not follow his point about the danger of having members of other political parties voting in a party's internal elections of candidates. There is no risk of our having anything like the American system in which, for example, Republicans can vote for Democrats. There is, at least, no risk of that in the Labour party, which will not allow even its own members to vote to choose a candidate. Late in the hon. Gentleman's speech, it emerged that he has serious concerns about the way in which Labour is proceeding, and that he has protested to the national executive committee.

The House also enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). I gather that he is now communing with a cup of tea, but we understood his strong feeling against the closed-list system. He said that he would abstain, but that the closed-list system is futile and will, in his words, cause festering resentment. The Home Secretary will have been pleased to hear of the hon. Gentleman's personal admiration for him. The hon. Gentleman also said that he was a safe pair of trousers. Notwithstanding all his efforts to get into his party's good books, however, the hon. Gentleman could not bring himself to support the closed-list system.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) spoke with considerable passion about her support for the open-list system, and about the need for the electorate to have a direct link with its representative. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) also spoke passionately on that theme.

The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) seemed at one point to be a late entrant as a supporter of the closed-list system, but even he managed—diplomatically—to qualify his speech. He said that he would have preferred the Government to take another course, and that he preferred the open-list principle.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): No, he did not.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate said that the Government had taken an unfortunate decision at an earlier stage, and that he supported the Belgian system—a semi-open form of list—in principle. The fact that the Minister seeks comfort in that makes it plain how desperate the Government Front-Bench team has become in its search for support.

There was, of course, no support for the Government from the Conservative Benches. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) made a very good speech in which he drew fairly attention to widespread concern about and lack of support for the Government's proposals in the other place. My hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) made the important point that the Bill was not a minor detail. When history comes to be written, historians will, as my hon. Friend asserted, argue that the Government acted wrongly, and that they set a bad precedent for our electoral system by depriving voters of choice.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) also made a good point in asking why Members of the European Parliament should be condemned to a life of anonymity through the use of a list, rather than being able to create a direct link with the electorate. The same point has been made by many others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), who spoke from experience to show that voter recognition can exist.

In response to all that condemnation of the course that he has taken, the Home Secretary, in a speech that was perhaps not as good humoured as some of his earlier contributions to this debate—we can forgive him, because we have been over this course so often—gave up any pretence of making an argument on the subject. He did not try to build a case on the evidence but simply showed brass neck and what the hon. Member for Battersea described as chutzpah. He advanced ludicrous arguments.

The Home Secretary said that this was all a conspiracy got up by the Conservative party. He called it a conspiracy of non-understanding. If it was all got up by the Conservative party and the hereditary peers, I have to say that it extends to many groups and individuals not normally associated with the Conservative party. There has been widespread concern across many different groups about the Government's course.

Concern extends to Charter 88, whose briefing when the matter was first proposed last autumn said:

> "We believe that the closed list system originally proposed in the Bill where voters can only put their cross next to the party name should be replaced with a more open list system."

The Electoral Reform Society expressed a similar view. Its president, Earl Russell, is a member of the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Allan: A fine man.

Mr. Clappison: He was fine in that he had the courage to vote against the Government's proposal, against the Whip put on by the Liberal Democrats.

Concern extends to many in the media. Last October, when the proposals were first unveiled, *The Times* said that they were bad for democracy and would be bad eventually for the parties too. It described it as the worst possible kind of proportional representation for the European elections and said that it would result in placemen being put in the European Parliament, rather than individual representatives. *The Times* is also part of the conspiracy.

The Home Secretary reached his most ludicrous when he said that the idea that the closed list is anathema to our system of politics was pure nonsense. He forgets what he said last October in a leaked letter to a colleague reported in *The Guardian*. In setting out the case for a closed-list system, he said:

"though this is not a term which I think we should use."

The conspiracy of non-understanding may even extend to the Home Secretary himself.

The Home Secretary went on to say that, despite all our concerns, we have to agree because their manifesto commits the Government to the closed-list system. The Labour party manifesto is not something that I normally carry around with me, but I have been helpfully furnished with a copy. It states:

"We have long supported a proportional voting system for election to the European Parliament."

There is no mention of the closed-list system and no reason why there should not be an open-list system. At least eight other members of the European Union have open-list systems that would have been compatible with that pledge. Why, out of all the systems that the Government could have chosen, did they choose one that maximised party control?

We think that the answer is clear, and it was given by another member of the Conservative hereditary peers' conspiracy against the Government, Lord Shore. He said:

"The issue is about the open list against the closed list. It is about an open democratic list against a closed party management list. It is about accountability to the electorate, to the voters, against accountability to a party committee".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 851.]

That view has been echoed time and again through our debates.

We cannot accept the latest review put forward by the Government. We regarded their original concession—it was described as a concession—as so minimal as to be meaningless. Their new concession is ludicrous. They now say that, in addition to the review of the operation of the closed-list system, we should have one of the operation of the open-list system. How can a review be conducted when that system is not operating? We welcome the fact that there will be consultation on who will chair the review, but we wonder what on earth it will find to do. All the evidence that will be available in six months' time is available now. It is a matter of principle, and the Government have come down on the wrong side. They have come down in favour of party control, rather than representative democracy—not voter choice, but control by the party bosses.

We hope that the closed-list system is not a harbinger of things to come, because it is bad in every conceivable respect from beginning to end. The debate and the Government's proposal are about promoting party control over individual choice and representative democracy. The proposal is a thoroughly bad thing and we are fully entitled to continue opposing it.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Regional Development Agencies Bill and the European Parliamentary Elections Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

Question agreed to.

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed and for disagreeing to the Commons amendment to the Bill in lieu, again considered.

Question again proposed, That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments, but does not insist on its amendment in lieu.

Mr. George Howarth: I should correct the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on one point. He said that we had produced the review system at the last minute. In fact, it is in response to a request from the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) some time ago. We thought that it was a reasonable request—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asks for something and is granted it. Then, most ungratefully, he laughs at our agreeing to his request.

The Opposition should acknowledge that we have said that they will be consulted about the way in which the process works, and we mean that sincerely. There is a real point to having a review. They asked for it and I hope that they will be good enough to acknowledge that.

It is customary to begin by saying that we have had a good debate. On this occasion, perhaps I will be forgiven for saying that it has been an interesting debate. We have certainly heard some good speeches, and I shall refer to one or two in a moment, but frankly, the debate has not moved on a great deal since Second Reading. Opposition Members have their view and we have ours, and there does not seem to have been a meeting of minds. If they have doubts about whether the Bill has been debated thoroughly, I remind them that the House has debated it on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report and has considered Lords amendments for a total of 31 hours and 45 minutes. I would have thought that almost everything that could have been said about the Bill, and the choice of an open or closed-list system, had been said.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Could the Minister say which Labour Back Benchers would support the Government policy on a free vote?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman asks a silly question. I wonder whether he could tell me how many of his colleagues would have voted in the poll tax had they had a free vote on it when they were in government. It is the same principle. We were elected on a manifesto commitment to introduce a proportional system for European elections and that is what we will deliver.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howarth: No. Let us not forget that, had it not been for the stubbornness of the unelected second Chamber, we would not be debating this matter for the fourth time tonight. Conservative Members have advanced no new arguments tonight. Nor have they made any attempt to explain how the perverse results that an open-list system can produce—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. There are far too many conversations going on in the Chamber.

Mr. Howarth: Nor has anyone explained how the perverse results that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has repeatedly explained could possibly be justified to the electorate in the circumstances that he described earlier. Quite honestly, the discovery that the person who got the most votes in such a system was not elected would be met by bafflement among the electorate—and rightly so.

There has not been any sort of answer to the damning admission made by Lord Bethell, himself a former and aspiring Member of the European Parliament, whose words my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary quoted at the start of the debate, that he and his fellow Conservative hopefuls in London would be known only to the tiniest fraction of the electorate. I might add that, as a result of his being frequently mentioned in tonight's debate, Lord Bethell is probably rather better known now than he was before he wrote that letter.

The Government remain firmly convinced that the closed-list system is the most fair and appropriate system for Britain to use to elect its MEPs. It is easy to use and produces fair and clear results. We also remain convinced that this House must prevail over the other place, which, for all its undoubted merits in other respects, has been elected by no one and lacks any democratic legitimacy.

We listened to the views of the other place, and first introduced and then strengthened the review clause. We hope that the other place will now return the favour and listen to the clear and unambiguous message which is the will of this House—*[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members doubt that, I suggest that they look to see who goes into which Lobby tonight. The result will be the expression of the will of this House—an expression of which the Lords will take notice. A combination of the unelected in the House of Lords and the unelectable sitting on the Conservative Benches here will not thwart the will of this House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 122.

Division No. 377] **[10.6 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon

Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jonez, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Sloate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Hanson and Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam

Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tim Collins.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment in lieu of the Lords amendments agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Broadcasting

That the draft Channel 4 (Application of Excess Revenues) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.

Legal Aid and Advice

That the draft Legal Advice and Assistance (Scope) (Amendment) Regulations 1998, which were laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.

Contracting Out

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions in Relation to Insurance) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 22nd October, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Agenda 2000: Financial Aspects

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7046/98, Commission Communication on the Establishment of a new Financial Perspective for the period 2000–2006; 7221/98, Commission report on the implementation of the Inter-institutional Agreement of 29th October 1993 on budgetary discipline and improvement of the budgetary procedure together with proposals for renewal; 9302/98, the European Court of Auditors Special Report No. 6/98 on the Court's assessment of the system of resources based on VAT and GNP; and 11666/98, Commission report on the operation of the Own Resources system; and supports the Government's efforts to maintain budget discipline in the Community and to ensure the fair financing of the EU, reflecting Member States' ability to pay.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 17th November, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Margaret Beckett relating to Scrutiny of European Business not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first such Motion, and such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

LIAISON COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mrs. Margaret Hodge be discharged from the Liaison Committee and Mr. Malcolm Wicks be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Salmon Farming (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

10.21 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise on the Adjournment of the House the subject of the Scottish salmon farming industry. I am very pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who is Minister with responsibility for the highlands and islands, is present to reply to the debate because, between our two constituencies, we supply a substantial proportion of Scottish-produced farmed salmon.

The debate is an opportunity to emphasise the importance of the industry to Scotland as a whole, and to the highlands and islands in particular. In spite of many adversities confronting the industry, it has been one of Scotland's economic success stories. A recent Scottish Office and Highlands and Islands Enterprise survey shows that about 6,500 jobs in Scotland depend on the salmon farming industry—about 2,000 on farms and another 4,500 jobs upstream or downstream, in such industries as feed, supply and repair of cages and, obviously, the important salmon processing industry. The salmon farming industry has a turnover of about £260 million, and I am sure that the Minister would readily acknowledge that it is an industry that creates and sustains employment in many parts of the highlands and islands where there are no alternative forms of employment available. The industry is very important, so it is important that the House has an opportunity—albeit late in the evening—to discuss it.

The industry has not had to look far to find troubles and adversity. Those of us who have been in the House for some years remember the cyclical nature of the market and how, at this time of almost every other year, in the period leading up to Christmas—one of the busiest times for the salmon farming industry—there was a crisis, amidst allegations that the Norwegians were dumping cheap salmon on the European market.

Eventually, the allegations of dumping by the Norwegians were referred to and investigated by the European Commission, and the claims were held to be well established. That led to a negotiated agreement between the European Union and Norway, which effectively imposed a minimum import price—not a quota, which many in the salmon farming industry had wanted. There were mixed views at the time about how effective the minimum import price would be. I spoke to one producer today who said that its existence prevented a free fall in the price earlier this year, for which he was thankful.

This is probably the first opportunity that the House has had to hear from a Minister about the Government's assessment of the effectiveness of the regime and the agreement reached between the European Union and Norway in May last year. Under that, there are individual agreements between the EU and a number of Norwegian exporters. It is possible for the EU to take action against those breaching the rules, including the imposition of a tariff on exports to the EU.

On 31 August this year, there was a report in *The Herald* quoting the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, which identified three violations of the agreement. As I have informed the Minister, there have been recent reports in Norwegian newspapers of Norwegian exporters coming to arrangements with Danish importers to try legally to circumvent the rules. Information on those allegations has been given by the Scottish Salmon Growers Association to the Commission.

I hope that the Minister will not only provide the Government's assessment of the effectiveness of the agreement reached last year, but will tell us what the Government do to monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements. Can he reassure the House that at all times, particularly in the light of the most recent allegations, they will press the Commission to monitor the situation and take effective action where any breach of the agreement is found?

I understand that import prices are to be averaged out over a quarter, and that they must average at the minimum import price or above. The last quarter of this year has started in October and the early weeks of November with volumes from Norway reducing the price well below the minimum import price. Doubts are being expressed whether between now and 31 December, prices can be sufficiently above the MIP to average at the MIP or above. What sanction will there be if, come February, it is found that the average price for this quarter—which is one of the most important times for the industry—was below the minimum import price?

The Norwegian Government undertook some self-restraint with respect to feed quotas. They announced for this year an increase in feed quota of 2.3 per cent., whereas the volume sold is up by 12 per cent. In spite of a weak market in Europe and the problems of the markets in Norway and Japan, a 10 per cent. increase is proposed by the Norwegian Government for 1999. That would lead to a substantially bigger volume coming on to the market. What representations have the Government made to the Norwegian Government about such an increase in their feed quota?

The MIP was fixed in May last year in ecus. At that time, the value was £2.75 per kilogram, whereas it is now £2.25 per kilogram. The strength of the pound has therefore led to a 20 per cent. loss of revenue for salmon producers. Do the Government intend to seek a revaluation or a change in the minimum import price to reflect the loss of value in real terms because of the strength of the pound in the intervening 18 months?

One of the other difficulties facing the industry has been the outbreak of infectious salmon anaemia—ISA. That was first reported in the west of Scotland in May. There was a confirmed case in Shetland in August. Can the Minister tell the House how many cases have been confirmed and when the last one was confirmed? There is a perception that the disease has been brought under control, but one hopes that one is not speaking too soon. An update would be useful.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): My hon. and learned Friend is aware that in my constituency, salmon farming is extremely important. A number of producers have had to destroy all their stock because of ISA. Does he agree that the Government could give some help and restore confidence to the industry if they examined the

[Mrs. Ray Michie]

1993 EC legislation which provides for a 50 per cent. contribution to the cost of compensation, particularly for the smaller independent fish farms?

Mr. Wallace: My hon. Friend makes an important point about compensation. There has been a huge loss to the industry as a result of having to slaughter stocks. Indeed, there has been the immediate slaughter of stocks because ISA is a so-called list 1 disease. I want to emphasise—I hope that the Minister will do so as well—that there is no evidence that the virus associated with ISA has any effect on humans and that there is no risk to human consumption. Nevertheless, it has a pernicious effect on the fish and has led to slaughter. This has meant that producers have been faced with huge losses. Undoubtedly, claims for compensation are inevitable.

Earlier this year in the Court of Session, following an outbreak of viral haemorrhagic septicaemia on the island of Gigha in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie)—a list 2 disease—it was found that the failure by the Secretary of State to provide for payment of any compensation where slaughter orders were made was illegal. I know that that outbreak can be distinguished because it involved a list 2 disease, but it is an important point that the fish were slaughtered on the orders of the Scottish Office. In the circumstances, the case for some element of compensation is strong.

Looking to the future in terms of insurance and compensation, it is obvious that there is a need to attract insurers into the market. As someone put it to me, "You will not get someone to insure a house when it is on fire." It is important that the problem is brought under control and eradicated. It is important also that those who are engaged in insurance see the problem as an insurable risk.

My understanding is that the industry has indicated a willingness to work with the Government and to make a contribution towards future insurance and compensation packages. However, the Government must shoulder their share of responsibility and likewise indicate a willingness to make a contribution. A joint Government and industry working group has been considering how interim cover arrangements can be put in place until such time as the disease becomes an insurable risk. That has happened in Norway and it is now possible to insure against ISA at affordable premiums. Is the Minister able to report on the progress of the joint Government and industry working group? Does he accept that in such situations, the Government have a role to play in shouldering some of the burden until it is commercially viable for insurers to offer insurance and for the industry to be able to afford the premiums?

That development in turn will require the consideration of some technical measures. In Norway, ISA is an insurable risk, but there has not been total eradication. However, the number of outbreaks has been reduced to such a low level that the insurers have been persuaded that it is a market in which they can become involved. There must be a good understanding of the technical and scientific issues that are involved. How, for example, did ISA get to Scottish waters? How does it spread? What is being done—perhaps the Minister can tell us—to advance technical and scientific knowledge of this disease?

Will the Minister think about more flexibility? I understand that under European Union rules, the fish have had to be slaughtered immediately. That means that a substantial volume has been slaughtered in a relatively few weeks whereas in Norway, it has been possible, when outbreaks have occurred, to slaughter over a period of months. That means also that there has been a more managed eradication which has had less impact on the market. As the fish have been slaughtered immediately here, there is no opportunity to mitigate loss through allowing for further growth. That makes insurance a less attractive proposition.

Many small producers who have not been affected directly by ISA in their own salmon farms have felt the effect of the disease because salmon that has been slaughtered has been put on the market in substantial volumes, which has driven the price down. This has meant that there has been a requirement by banks for many smaller producers to advance more collateral against borrowings. That has put great pressure on smaller producers and obviously inhibits the development of the industry. For these reasons, we want to be reassured on the technical measures that the Government are pursuing to try to ensure that there is a better understanding of the disease and that it can be contained in future.

Another issue that arises from ISA is the substantial investment—some £1 million—that was required in Shetland to install at very short notice blood water treatment equipment at salmon processing plants. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), was in my constituency earlier this month and received some representations on that matter. I know that his visit was much appreciated.

Those arrangements had to be implemented swiftly, and financial instruments for fisheries guidance grant applications have now been made. I do not expect the Minister to tell me this evening that they will be successful, but I urge him to look on them favourably and sympathetically because they respond to an immediate problem and are an investment in the industry's future.

The industry welcomes the transfer of responsibility for planning arrangements from the Crown Estate Commissioners to local authorities. In Shetland and parts of Orkney, works licences are already issued by local authorities, but new arrangements would have to be made in the highlands, Argyll and Bute and the Western Isles. Local authorities will need to pool their resources because the number of applications will be relatively small and each local authority could not be expected to have its own marine expert. Some certainty is required about the transfer time and the arrangements that will be made in the interim, because primary legislation will be needed and that might have to await the Scottish Parliament. Clearly, salmon farmers wishing to develop, expand or set up new sites need to know the position in the meantime. Guidance on that from the Minister this evening would be welcome.

On the bureaucracy faced by the industry, I am advised that the Veterinary Medicines Directorate is slow in processing licensed medicines for salmon. While Norway has eight licensed sea lice treatments, the United Kingdom has only one and a half. I queried how we manage to have a half and was told that hydrogen peroxide cannot be used in the summer because of water temperature, so it is available for only six months of the year. The Ministry

does not seem to have enough push to deal with those matters within the European Union. The industry would welcome some assistance on that front.

In conclusion, we cannot underestimate the important role of salmon farming and agriculture in rural development. There are short-term problems, but also long-term opportunities. In the future, there will be a global demand for agricultural products. Scotland's assets include natural resources; a human skills base—many jobs now have increasingly skilled components; niche marketing skills; proximity and access to European markets; a strong domestic market, with an 11 per cent. increase to September this year; and an end product that commands consumer support. Although the industry has had some development grants, it has reached its present state without subsidy. It wants to ensure that it is up to date and takes on the best in terms of environmental assessment and environmental management systems. Westray and Hoy in Orkney now have organic salmon farms. Thus the industry is taking a long-term view and it wants reassurance tonight that the Government support it.

This may be the last time that the House of Commons debates the Scottish salmon farming industry, because next July responsibility for it will transfer to the Scottish Parliament. That Parliament will recognise an industry that is important for Scotland and offers great opportunity for development in Scotland. This evening, we want some support and reassurance that the Government will help to see it through its current difficult times.

10.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Calum Macdonald): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on securing this debate. I entirely agree with him about the industry's importance to Scotland, particularly its most fragile and remote areas. I welcome the participation of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) in the debate.

The hon. and learned Gentleman made a number of points and I should like to get through as many as I can. On the agreement between the European Union and Norway, it is a measure of our commitment to the industry that one of the first things that the Government did last year—led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my noble Friend Lord Sewel—was to intercede with the European Commission in the action initiated by the Scottish industry against its Norwegian counterpart for dumping farmed salmon on the Community market.

It is well known that we did not think that the action agreed by the EU went far enough—as the hon. and learned Gentleman said, it received a mixed reception—but, to its credit, the Commission has taken its responsibilities for monitoring and enforcing the agreement with the Norwegians seriously. The result has been that the Commission has imposed duties on 36 companies. A further three face a similar prospect, and, as a result of EU pressure through the agreement, the number of companies registered to trade has been reduced from 191 to 135.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, the main aim of the agreement is to introduce a degree of stability in the salmon market. That involves imposing a minimum import price for salmon exported from Norway to the EU; requiring Norwegian exporters to register and exposing them to tariffs if they breach those prices; and requiring that part of the export tax imposed by the Norwegian authorities to be used for generic marketing of Atlantic salmon. The latter has taken time to settle and to organise, but I understand that a way ahead has been agreed, involving the industries of Scotland, Norway and Ireland. Today, a £4 million advertising campaign, funded by that export tax, has started in France, Germany and Spain.

Earlier this year there were signs that, at long last, the agreement was beginning to have the desired effect. Prices began to rise, offering Scottish growers some long-overdue promise of better times, but they dipped a few months ago, when the Norwegians placed sizeable quantities of small fish on the market. That was made worse by similar placements as a result of infectious salmon anaemia outbreaks in this country. We look to the price drop being reversed as the Christmas trade approaches.

The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the report of Norwegian producers using Denmark to get around the regulations. We were not aware of that, but we will investigate, contact the Scottish Salmon Growers Association and pursue the matter with the Commission. He also mentioned the impact of the pound on the agreement. It is up to the EU to renegotiate the agreement, but it is important to bear in mind that sterling has fallen against the deutschmark by 10 per cent. in the past year.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman made clear, ISA is a matter of concern. I agree with him that there is no evidence that the disease has any effect on human health. It was first confirmed at a farm on Loch Nevis on 15 May this year and since then there has been confirmation on 10 farms, including one in the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency. The common denominator appears to be site-to-site contact, although the source is still a mystery. It is being investigated.

A further 11 farms are suspected of having the disease, including one on Shetland which has been cleared of its fish. As a consequence of all that, movement restrictions have been imposed over a wide area and 198 farms are currently affected. The last known incident was in September and I share the hon. and learned Gentleman's hope that the disease might have run its course.

ISA is classified as a list 1 disease under EU legislation, which requires that eradication action must be taken when the disease is confirmed. That entails a number of procedures, and fallowing of the sites for at least six months before restocking. Movement restrictions have been imposed over a wide area and a rigorous inspection regime is under way. This is the first time that anyone in the EU has experienced the disease and it is almost inevitable that our processes for handling it are being developed as time goes on. I stress, however, that we are in close contact with the Commission, which has expressed itself satisfied with the steps that we are taking.

I am conscious that the ISA outbreak is causing hardship, and that things could get worse if the suspected sites are confirmed or if outbreaks occur elsewhere. Already, there have been redundancies, and I am aware of the considerable concern that the disease should be contained.

I pay tribute to those in Shetland who have had to deal with the consequences of the outbreak. That response has been positive, and it has been recognised that without such

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

action others could face a similar plight. I particularly want to pay tribute to Shetland Islands council, which has made available some £100,000 for disinfection of liquid effluent from salmon processors. I am also grateful to Shetland Enterprise for its £50,000 contribution towards that work, which is vital if reinfection is to be avoided.

The hon. and learned Gentleman said that producers have made an application for FIFG support. It is available into next year, but it is as well that they have put in their applications, because the last date for doing so is 31 December. Most of the £5 million—£4.1 million of it—allocated to FIFG has already been awarded, so there is pressure on resources. The final round will be allocated early next year.

It is now almost two months since the last outbreak was confirmed, I know that everyone in the industry shares the hon. and learned Gentleman's hope that we are past the worst.

The problem of disposing of slaughtered fish in a small place such as Shetland could be severe. Thus far we have received considerable support from the Norwegian authorities in handling waste from infected farms, and we are grateful to them for that. We are exploring alternative arrangements should the need arise in the future.

It is precisely because of those problems that rigorous controls are being enforced. The total co-operation of all concerned is absolutely vital. As I said earlier, we are all learning lessons about the disease as time goes on. In the light of experience gained, we have introduced a graduated approach to the fallowing of sites within restricted zones, which reflects the disease risk in each case. It is important for all concerned to recognise and accept that we cannot cut corners.

The hon. and learned Gentleman spoke about the need for fish farmers to be encouraged to report disease early on. He suggested that a compensation scheme could be beneficial and that its application should be considered more widely. The industry has so far shown a responsible attitude, and I very much hope and expect that to continue, regardless of the compensation issue.

I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that we are continuing to discuss all the options. However, it would be less than frank of me not to mention the fact that it has not been the policy of successive Governments to pay compensation for fish diseases. Indeed, we do not have the legislative competence, as the hon. and learned Gentleman knows from incidents of shellfish poisoning in his constituency. Equally, it is important to recognise that the issue is not simply one for the taxpayer; we need to explore the scope for the industry to recognise its obligation to address the financial consequences of the disease.

The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned Gigha. In that case, the disease was viral haemorrhagic septicaemia, which is a list 2 disease for which the rules are different. A judgment in that case is the subject of an appeal, so I cannot comment on it further.

As for the hon. and learned Gentleman's point about medicines, I recognise the industry's concern that it is being denied the use of treatments available to Norwegian competitors. The use of medicines is a sensitive issue. Statutory procedures are laid down and must be observed. Nevertheless, we are conscious of the view that such treatments could overcome a number of problems, and I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that we shall continue to seek to ensure that applications receive speedy attention.

The hon. and learned Gentleman also spoke about local authority involvement in the approval of fish farm developments. That reflects the Government's decision, after full consultation, that, subject to endorsement by the Scottish Parliament, local authorities should have formal planning responsibilities. We believe that outcome to be the right one: the issue is for local communities to decide, and they should have a say in the matter. There were many complaints in the past about the way in which the Crown Estate Commissioners handled the matter, and about the fact that local communities did not have a direct, democratic say.

To help in the process of consideration we have done what the hon. and learned Gentleman suggested, and issued draft locational guidance. Advice on environmental assessments, commissioned by the Crown Estate and the industry, has also been produced. Consistency across authorities is never guaranteed; but then it does not apply in other planning areas, and that is right in principle. Different areas have different priorities. The point to recognise is that, in addition to central guidelines for local authorities, there will be a formal right of appeal for applicants.

It is always difficult to respond to all the points in a debate such as this. If I have missed any out, perhaps hon. Members will bring them to my attention, and I will respond in writing. I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland on securing the debate, and on clearly articulating the concerns and desires of the industry at what is undoubtedly a difficult time. I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman and the industry that the Government remain firmly committed to a fully sustainable fish-farming sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 17 November 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL [*Lords*]

Ordered,

That the promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

Ordered,

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

Ordered,

That the Petition relating to the Bill presented in the present Session which stands referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

Ordered,

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the present Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph (*b*) of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

Ordered,

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)" were omitted;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—[*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Right to Buy

1. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What plans he has to revise right-to-buy legislation. [58604]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): On 28 July I announced proposals to improve value for money by replacing the current £50,000 maximum discount limit with nine regional limits. This change would result in a maximum cash limit ranging from £22,000 to £38,000. Tenants would continue to be eligible for up to 60 per cent. off the value of a house and 70 per cent. off the value of a flat. We are considering the responses to consultation and we shall announce our decisions as soon as possible.

Mr. Hughes: I welcome what the Minister said, but may I ask her to be much braver and to look at other matters, especially things that adversely affect leaseholders in the borough where she lives when she is in London, of which I am a Member of Parliament—Southwark? Will she consider the fact that many boroughs, including Southwark, wait to do capital works on estates until the protected period for new purchasers is over, when they do not have to make much of a contribution, so that the leaseholders suddenly have to make a whacking contribution to the cost of what is otherwise a council development?

Will the Minister also ensure that boroughs do not abuse the system by lumping on to leaseholders' bills the cost of large amounts of communal works that they have not done for decades, so that leaseholders suddenly find themselves paying for drains, road repairs, pavements and so on, which the Labour council should have done a hell of a long time before?

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman is referring to another aspect on which the Government are about to consult—the future of leaseholding. We expect in the next few weeks to issue a consultation document on leaseholding, and the hon. Gentleman will then have every opportunity to make representations.

Dr. Doug Naysmith (Bristol, North-West): Do the Government have any plans to introduce legislation to help people who, having been encouraged to do so, buy properties—such as high-rise flats—and then discover that those properties are worthless?

Ms Armstrong: Earlier this year, we announced proposals to offer councils a financial incentive to buy back ex-council flats and houses from owners in difficulty. We aim to enable people to enter home ownership and to sustain that wherever possible. However, as my hon. Friend says, it is impossible to re-sell some properties because they are in a block on

which lenders are unwilling to consider granting mortgages. Councils have the right—which they were given by the previous Administration—to buy back such properties. Under our proposals, 25 per cent. of councils' costs would be covered.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): May I ask the Minister, lest she be tempted to do anything foolish, to think carefully before acting on proposals that will discourage home ownership and make it more difficult for tenants, especially in London and the south, to buy their own homes? Does she accept that the changes that are proposed will adversely affect approximately one in 10 families in England and one in four families in London, and that their discounts could be reduced by between £12,000 in London and £28,000 in the north-east? What possible justification is there for that type of attack on home ownership?

Ms Armstrong: I find it amusing that the hon. Gentleman cautions me about being foolish, but there you go, Madam Speaker. As I said in my previous answer, we are interested in sustainable home ownership, but we are also interested in ensuring that the taxpayer gets value for money. Both those interests must be upheld in pursuing this policy. The hon. Gentleman exaggerated somewhat.

Mr. Burns: No. It is in the Minister's answer.

Madam Speaker: Order. I will not have comments from sedentary positions, whether they are from Front Benchers or Back Benchers.

Ms Armstrong: It is not one in four families in London who will be affected but one in four of those who buy at the top end of the market and who are already council tenants. The present figure for council tenancy in London is far from one in four families, so the hon. Gentleman is exaggerating. He clearly has not listened to what I have said—but that is not untypical.

We want to ensure that people are able to buy and sustain their own homes. At the same time, the Government respect the rights of taxpayers. The current policy costs taxpayers £400 million a year, and we want to ensure that that is not an ever-escalating bill. Our proposals will ensure that the vast majority of tenants continue to be eligible for a discount of up to 70 per cent. when buying their own homes. I believe that the taxpayers will find that very generous and very fair.

Lake District

2. **Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): What proposals he has for environmental improvements in the Lake district. [58605]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): In order to enhance the environment and preserve the special character of the national park, the Government are working with local partners in developing a sustainable Lake district transport strategy. The Government will also provide the Association of National Park Authorities with an additional £2 million next year to improve national parks generally. I can inform my hon. Friend that the Cumbria area has so far received almost £1 million for its rural bus initiatives.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My hon. Friend is well aware that there are major problems with road and rail systems and the environment in Cumbria—particularly in the Lake district. Can we be assured that the important review that is now going on—which we all called for—will change the environment and have a real impact on Cumbria, which has gone without for many generations?

Mr. Meale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has worked tirelessly in this area for many years since his election as a Member of Parliament. He knows that the Secretary of State and I are interested in trying to implement a real strategy for the Cumbria area in order to sort out some of its problems. The Deputy Prime Minister and I visited the area on 10 October this year, and I visited again on 17 October. We have already put together a grant in aid for the Cumbria county council of £150,000 for work on the development of multi-modal interchange facilities for the area. The core partnerships in the Lake district are about to start work on that. We hope to produce a report shortly, which we shall bring before the House.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will the Minister accept that his interest, and that of his colleagues, in the affairs of Cumbria is very welcome? However, it would be helpful if he could give some idea of the time scale for reaching some firm conclusions. Will he reassure my constituents that he will bear in mind the unique nature of the area and its dependence on tourism? In particular, does he now recognise that Kendal is not in West Cumbria? Will he confirm that he now has more of an understanding of the geography of Cumbria than of Cyprus?

Mr. Meale: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I know where Cumbria is, as I visited the area many times when I was much younger. The Government acknowledge that tourism is very important to Cumbria. Any changes made will benefit the area so that more people can visit and have a better time when they are there.

Local Government Finance

3. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What representations he has received from the Local Government Association regarding the local government finance settlement for 1999–2000. [58606]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): The Local Government Association and special interest groups within it have made a number of representations during discussions on next year's financial settlement for local government.

Mr. Gray: I am sure that those groups were grateful to the Minister for her valuable time. Will she now find time to meet a delegation from Wiltshire county council, which will explain to her the consequences of last year's settlement and the £100 million that her Government robbed from shire counties? Sparsity and rural poverty in Wiltshire make it one of the eight worst-funded counties

in England. That is in stark contrast to the Prime Minister's constituency, which did conspicuously well in last year's settlement. Will the Minister explain why that was so?

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman forgets that the Prime Minister represents a rural constituency, too. At the request of the LGA, I have met each of the groupings in the LGA, including the county councils network. The hon. Gentleman knows from his previous position, before he became a Member of Parliament, that the period for representations on individual budgets comes once the settlement has been announced. If Wiltshire wants to make representations, we will consider them. Following the actions on which I suspect the hon. Gentleman had some influence under the previous Government, we want to make the settlement much fairer than it was when we took office. The hon. Gentleman may be able to give us lessons on how to make sure that some councils get more money than others.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I accept that the Government's objective is to make the distribution far fairer, but alterations to area cost adjustments and standard spending assessments while the overall limit remains fixed will only please some people and upset others. Will my hon. Friend recognise the plight of councils such as Burnley, which have had their capping level frozen for a number of years? Those are a small group of authorities with a particular problem, which I hope the Government will try to correct.

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend is honest when he admits that, when one redistributes money, some gain and some lose, and that one can never please everybody all the time. The position of the authorities that he represents has been put to me. I have met that grouping. My hon. Friend will also know that the Deputy Prime Minister made it clear, following the comprehensive spending review, that there will be no pre-announced capping limits this year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Further to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) about the vindictive attack on some of the shire counties, is the Minister aware that there is a sub-group of local authorities that have both rural and urban characteristics—the town and country issues group? This is the third time that I have raised their plight with her in the House. Could it be third time lucky? If she has not already done so, will she agree to meet that group?

Ms Armstrong: The House is no doubt becoming aware that, if I saw every delegation before the settlement was announced, we would not have time to do the work necessary to deliver the settlement. We saw every delegation that asked to see us after the last settlement. Since then, I have met the LGA in partnership meetings and I have met the groupings recommended to us by the LGA. I have read and listened to the arguments of the town and country issues group on many occasions. I utterly reject any suggestion of vindictive treatment of shire counties last year. Far from it—we are delivering a much fairer settlement than the right hon. Lady's Government ever managed to do.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): The majority of local government appreciates the opportunity to meet my hon. Friend and discuss matters before the SSA is settled. Will she ensure that the planned 15 per cent. increase in SSAs over the next three years provides an opportunity to distribute resources more fairly in local government, without any authority losing money? Will she assure the House and the country that she will live up to the promise to make the settlement fairer, so that authorities such as mine receive a fairer deal over the next three years?

Ms Armstrong: We have made it clear that we are seeking to move to a much fairer settlement. There are difficult issues on the table this year. I hope that, when the statement is made to the House in two or three weeks' time, the House will recognise that the Government have listened to the representations made to them and have taken steps towards establishing fairness. The Government are putting substantial new money into local government over the next three years as a result of the comprehensive spending review. That is a demonstration of our commitment to local government and our support for the public services that it delivers.

Jackie Ballard (Taunton): I am sure that the Minister is aware that for many years local authorities, such as Somerset county council, have prioritised spending on education and social services at the expense both of other vital services and of non-statutory services. When can local government expect the Government to allow it the financial freedom to meet the needs and priorities of its local citizens?

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Lady seems to be asking for every service to have priority, but the very nature of priority is that one prioritises. The Government have a manifesto commitment to prioritise health and education. We have made it clear through the comprehensive spending review that we will lift crude and universal capping, but we have also made it clear that we regard local government as an important part of the public sector and, therefore, of the overall public purse.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware of the findings of the recent independent report produced for the county councils network that school transport costs more per pupil in rural areas than in urban areas?

Ms Armstrong: As I have said, I have received representations from the county councils network. I have met its representatives and we shall take their representations into account when reaching decisions on the settlement.

Mrs. Shephard: If the hon. Lady agrees with those findings, does she accept that the Government's decision—it was her Government's decision—to switch £100 million away from rural areas in this year's settlement was wrong? Does she also accept that boasting, as she has often done, of making a £50 million rural transport grant to the very areas that she has already robbed of £100 million, is not only naive but ludicrous?

Ms Armstrong: The right hon. Lady does not seem to learn from one Question Time to another. I made it absolutely clear at the previous Question Time that the her figures are wrong. If one takes the amount of money

going into those rural areas along with that going to the shire districts and counties, one sees that there was nothing like a switch of £100 million. The right hon. Lady knows that, but she chooses to ignore it. That is politics, and I accept that. But the right hon. Lady also chooses to denigrate the £150 million that will go into rural bus services during the next three years. I do not wonder that she tries to do that, because the Conservative Government, of which she was a member, ensured that some rural areas simply had no buses. I hope that she is proud of her actions.

Incinerators

4. **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): What monitoring is undertaken by his Department on the siting of proposed *(a)* animal incinerators and *(b)* household waste incinerators. [58607]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Details on the siting of waste incinerators which are subject to planning permission are kept on the planning registers of local planning authorities. My Department keeps details of planning permissions granted and refused for incineration development both with energy recovery and without energy recovery, which can be used for monitoring. These records do not differentiate between animal and household waste incinerators.

Mr. Pickthall: The village of Burscough in my constituency has been under siege for some time now by developers who wish to site three animal incinerators there. Alongside that, neighbouring local authorities plan to increase the number of household waste incinerators. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we desperately need a strategic overview of the location of incinerators and, with that in mind, will he review the document issued by the Department in August 1997, which says that incinerators can be installed without planning permission where there is a building or land already designated for general industrial use? Would that not mean that, wherever there was an industrial site in Britain, incinerators could sprout up, without local people or local authorities being able to object to them?

Mr. Meacher: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. A planning application for the development of an incinerator—whether it is made in an industrial area or not—has to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations dictate otherwise, and in the light of planning guidance from the Department.

My hon. Friend is correct to say that we issued guidance in respect of over-30-months scheme incineration on 8 August last year, but in February this year we also issued for consultation the final draft of planning policy guidance note 10, entitled "Waste Disposal and Management". That advises on the location of waste management facilities and suggests that, although some industrial sites may be appropriate for site-specific reasons, there are a range of other options.

Travellers

5. **Ms Claire Ward** (Watford): What discussions he has had with local authorities about the effect of travellers on local communities. [58608]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We have had a number of discussions with local authorities, and with hon. Members, about gipsies and travellers. These have helped us to develop our policy on unauthorised camping, set out in "Managing Unauthorised Camping: A Good Practice Guide", which we published on 29 October, jointly with the Home Office. The good practice guidance stresses the need for local authorities and the police to develop joint protocols to deal more effectively with this issue. The good practice guidance, and the associated research report, are in the Library.

Ms Ward: Is my hon. Friend aware of the substantial costs that may be incurred by landowners and local businesses in obtaining court orders, and that local authorities have powers to obtain similar court orders more cheaply and quickly than those private applicants? Will he issue further guidance to local authorities to assist local businesses to obtain court orders so that we may be able to achieve a cheaper and more efficient way of removing some travellers, who are causing difficulties and expense for local communities and businesses?

Mr. Raynsford: I understand the concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed. I draw her attention to paragraph 4.5 of the good practice guidance, which specifically identifies the extent to which local authorities may assist private owners in action where there is unauthorised occupation as one of the issues that should be developed as part of local plans. I therefore urge her to talk to her local authority and the local police to develop an effective local protocol.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Does the Minister recognise that we have a serious problem in Bedfordshire? One receives repeated representations from the farming community about the cost to farmers and other landowners of the removal of unauthorised travellers. Will he make the most urgent inquiries to find out whether the system be improved and made cheaper?

Mr. Raynsford: The evidence from the research undertaken by the university of Birmingham, on which we based the good practice guidance, was that there were wide variations in the performance of different local authorities and, indeed, different police authorities, in their response to the problem of unauthorised camping. The purpose of the good practice guidance, therefore, is to show what can be achieved, efficiently and cost-effectively, by the areas where there is the best co-operation. We want that to spread throughout the country, which is precisely why we issued the guidance, less than a month ago. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will commend it to his local authority and police.

Children's Parliament

6. **Mrs. Janet Dean** (Burton): Which parts of the country will be involved in the children's parliament. [58609]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): The children's parliament on the environment is open to all schools in England with year 6 pupils, building on the interest that young people have in their environment and giving them the opportunity to develop an understanding of the democratic process. I am pleased to announced that more than 2,000 schools have so far registered to participate.

Mrs. Dean: Given that climate change is likely to be one of the topics discussed at the children's parliament, will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether he is satisfied with the outcome of the Buenos Aires conference?

Mr. Prescott: I was pleased with the Buenos Aires conference, which followed a successful Kyoto conference at which legal targets for gas emissions were agreed. The Buenos Aires conference maintained that momentum and agreed a two-year action programme to ensure that climate change policy can be put into practice, and it sends the signal that Governments are serious about the urgent need to tackle the threat of global warming.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): As I chair a steering group that hopes to establish a UK youth parliament in 2000, may I ask what is the budget for the children's parliament?

Mr. Prescott: It is estimated at approximately £300,000.

Freeholders

7. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What action his Department is proposing to take to curb the activities of freeholders who demand retrospective payment from leaseholders for alterations made to their homes. [58610]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I share my hon. Friend's concern about the large payments that are sometimes demanded from leaseholders who alter their homes. That is just one example of how leaseholders can be exploited by unscrupulous landlords. We hope to issue shortly a consultation paper on leasehold reform.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware of the activities of companies such as Ladybrook Securities, Simarc Property Management, Chancery Lane Estates, Leafenvoy Ltd, Grace Favour Ltd, Compton Developments and Urban Point Property Management? They all have a track record throughout Greater Manchester, including my constituency of Bury, North, of issuing extortionate demands to leaseholders for minor administrative procedures such as retrospective consent for planning permission or notification of change of ownership. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that the scandalous exploitation of leaseholders will be tackled head on in the forthcoming consultation document?

Mr. Raynsford: I am well aware of the extensive concern, expressed by my hon. Friend and many other hon. Members from his region and other parts of the country, about the activities of some unscrupulous landlords who use loopholes in legislation to extract unreasonable sums from leaseholders. We are very concerned about it and are determined to tackle the abuse. I ask my hon. Friend to bear with us and wait for the forthcoming consultation paper to see precisely how we propose to end the abuse.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Minister accept that opportunities for leaseholders were considerably extended by the Housing Act 1996, introduced by the previous Government? Will he consider giving leaseholders an opportunity to apply directly to leasehold valuation tribunals in cases that commenced before that Act came into force, rather than simply allowing the courts to transfer such cases, as he is now considering?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman refers to the option of transferring cases from a court to a leasehold valuation tribunal. That will apply only in cases that are currently before the courts, and it would be wrong to deny the courts an opportunity to reach a view on such cases. However, we have acted in response to concerns expressed by leaseholders to make it possible, where the courts consider it appropriate, for the more informal—and sometimes better informed—leasehold valuation tribunals to deal with those complex and technical issues. That is the basis on which we have acted.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): The Minister referred to the consultation paper, which, in 1997, was promised for the following spring. It now appears that the consultation paper will be issued in spring 1999, which is more than a year late. May I urge the Minister to speed up the process on behalf of thousands of leaseholders throughout the country who suffer from malpractice by unscrupulous landlords or who have great difficulty in enfranchising themselves—something that they expected to be able to do under the previous Government's legislation?

Mr. Raynsford: I remind the hon. Gentleman that there is a history of frequent, ill-considered change in leasehold legislation. The previous Government's motives were often good, but the legislation was not properly thought through and, as a consequence, proved unworkable. That is why we are determined to get the package right this time and have given it careful and serious thought. As I said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), we intend to publish a consultation paper shortly, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not have to wait until next spring to see it.

Green Belt

8. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement about his policy on green-belt land. [58611]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Government's policy was stated in our response to the 10th report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee. We said:

"the Government favours robust Green Belt boundaries and a continuing presumption against inappropriate development within them."

Sir Sydney Chapman: However many houses our nation will need between now and 2016, and however great the proportion that can be built on brown-field sites or recycled land and land earmarked for industrial development, given that some will have to be built on green-field sites, why cannot the Government give a continuing commitment to protect established green-belt land, especially as it represents less than an eighth of England's countryside? Why cannot the Minister give that simple commitment?

Mr. Caborn: I want to put on record the fact that, since the Government came to power in May 1997, the amount of green belt has considerably increased. Each case will be judged on its merits. We have a specific commitment to PPG2 on the green belt. As for household growth, we are ensuring that this becomes a regional issue, we have made a commitment that 60 per cent. of building will be on brown-field sites, and we have commissioned the inquiry under Lord Rogers of Riverside. We have done more to protect the green belt in the past 18 months than the previous Administration did in 18 years.

Air Pollution (Fuel Duties)

29. **Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): If he will make a statement on the impact of the level of fuel duties on pollution. [58634]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): It is estimated that, over the period 1996–2002, the road fuel duty escalator—if continued at its current level of an increase of 6 per cent. per annum in real terms—will save between 2 million and 5 million tonnes of carbon in 2010, compared with the carbon emissions that would occur in 2010 under the alternative of no real duty increases over the relevant period.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. What estimate has he made of the impact that this enormous increase in duties will have on inflation, our business competitiveness and the automobile and related trades? Does he agree that, even if he achieves the figures that he has given, there is a distinct risk that the price in jobs, businesses and prosperity could be very high indeed?

Dr. Reid: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that his Government introduced the policy of a real increase in fuel duty. As it happens, we agree with that policy, but he obviously does not, which is probably why he is no longer a Front-Bench spokesman. The Government have made their commitment clear. We are committed to environmental considerations to achieve an improvement in the environment, and to working with motor manufacturers to produce more fuel-efficient engines with fewer emissions, so that motorists can not only save money, but contribute to an improvement in air quality and in the general environment. I am sure that that commitment is supported by motorists and non-motorists alike. It was advanced by the previous Government and has been continued by this Government. It seems that on this, as on many other questions, the right hon. Gentleman is isolated.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments, and the change in policy and momentum that the new Government have achieved. Will he examine more carefully the excellent example of the landfill tax? It is a hypothecated tax linked to landfill, and is doing much for the environment up and down the country. Could we have more hypothecated taxes that the public can see are linked to environmental improvement?

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend will be well aware that, in a landmark decision, the Deputy Prime Minister, with the Chancellor's agreement, proposed that we should have hypothecated taxation or charging to enable local authorities to take action on congested roads. That is a major step forward for the environment and for the reduction of congestion. It allows greater transparency, and will enable people to see that the charges they pay are being put towards the real alternative of a reliable, safe and modern public transport system. Once again, the Government are contributing towards the improvement of the environment and the creation of choice for motorists and non-motorists alike.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Given that the last Conservative Government imposed some £25 billion in extra fuel duties on motorists and that the new Government's policies would impose another £9 billion, is it not time—if we are to sell the principle of environmental taxation—to give something back to the taxpayer? That should be done not by making a small cut in vehicle excise duty, a proposal on which the Government are consulting, but by abolishing the duty—which is a tax on ownership rather than use of vehicles—for all but the most gas-guzzling cars.

Dr. Reid: The Government have given a great deal back to the taxpayer, in both environmental and transport terms. An example mentioned earlier is the £150 million for rural transport services, part of the £1.7 billion extra for transport. The hon. Gentleman may not know about the fuel duty rebates with which we are encouraging local authorities to make buses the centrepiece of local transport plans. We are taking a number of other measures. For instance, we are considering introducing a variable car tax. Under proposals announced by the Chancellor, there would be a lower car tax for smaller, more efficient vehicles.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an opportunity to describe the numerous benefits that the Government are delivering to the taxpayer, in transport as in so many other areas.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that the Government's announced intention to engage in yet more consultation—this time on variable rates of vehicle excise duty—has been memorably described by Friends of the Earth as "Carry on Consulting"? When will he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stop walking and talking, as his

right hon. Friend keeps putting it, and start making some decisions—or are they waiting for the Treasury to tell them what to do again?

Dr. Reid: "Carry on Consulting" is slightly preferable to "Carry on Matron", which is what we see every time the right hon. Lady comes to the Dispatch Box. I am surprised that she, as a leading member of what we are now told were a caring, sharing, sensitive, listening Government, should be so opposed in principle to consulting people. Perhaps, if that Government had consulted slightly more, she would not now be sitting on the Opposition Benches.

As for vehicle excise duty, I think that there will be wide and popular support for the idea that those who purchase and use smaller, more fuel-efficient and less polluting cars should pay less tax than those who use larger, less fuel-efficient and more polluting cars. The principle has already been agreed, we are consulting on the mechanisms, and I think that the proposal will be supported throughout the country.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): It is absolutely true that those who pollute most should pay most. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that the longer-term prospects are for leaner-burn and more efficient, effective and economic combustion systems that will reduce all pollutants from engines, and will enable us over time to deal with the matter in a quite different way—not simply through price mechanisms?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend has put his point as succinctly as anyone could have.

A303

30. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the A303. [58636]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): We are committed to carrying out the improvement of the A303 alongside Stonehenge and to a bypass of Winterbourne Stoke. The strategic role of the A303 and its remaining single carriageway sections will be considered as part of the corridor study from London to the south-west and south Wales. We will consult the regional planning conferences on this.

Mr. Heath: Can the Minister distinguish between schemes that are simply intended to make the road bigger and faster and to take people to Cornwall more quickly, and those that will save lives and relieve communities of heavy traffic? Will she look again at the section from Sparkford to Ilchester, and the slip road to the A359 which will relieve the village of Queen Camel?

Ms Jackson: I am somewhat surprised by the hon. Gentleman's rejection of an imaginative scheme that will protect what is surely one of the most important historic sites in the world, and is a clear demonstration of the close co-operation between Departments across Government.

The corridor study that I mentioned is a major multi-modal study, including not only roads but railways. The objective is to examine the scope for reducing congestion by considering better management of the road network and by shifting traffic from road to rail. Clearly, underpinning all those aims is one of the Government's primary considerations: to reduce accidents on roads.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Is the Minister aware that the delay of some five to seven years caused by the new study will give concern to my constituents, and to those using the A303 where it meets the A30 in my constituency? She will know that the A30 from Honiton to Exeter is being dualled and is a new road, which we welcome, but that the holiday build-up, particularly in July and August—which will be alleviated when the new road opens—will cause problems further back on that stretch of the A303 where it meets the A30. Is she content that, while another study is carried out, there will be mayhem for people trying to get into the west country in summer?

Ms Jackson: I am somewhat surprised that the hon. Lady seems to have plucked out of the air the figure of seven years. We hope that, subject to the regional planning conference, the study will start next year. However, as many sections of the scheme returned with boring regularity between 1989 and 1996 under her Administration—part of that inevitable wish list that everyone knew would never be achieved—I find her remarks somewhat absurd.

Northern Line

31. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): When the new rolling stock will come fully into service on the London Underground Northern line; and what has caused the delays. [58637]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): Madam Speaker—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps that passes in the House for the cry of, "Encore."

London Underground expects that a full Northern line service will be provided with new trains by early autumn 1999. The delivery of new trains was delayed by more than a year due to production problems at ALSTOM's train-building plant. Deliveries started during 1997.

Before the trains can be brought into service, a number of difficulties are being resolved relating to the train and associated systems. For example, there have been problems with the computer software on trains and a delay in delivering the train simulator.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am sure that, like mine, the hon. Lady's constituents will be deeply disappointed at the delays in bringing the new rolling stock on to the Northern line. As the private finance initiative negotiated contract contained a specific clause placing financial penalties on the manufacturers and suppliers of the rolling stock for late delivery, can she say what financial compensation will be paid either to the Government or to London Transport?

Ms Jackson: On the ground of commercial confidentiality, I regret that I cannot give the absolute figure, but there is little doubt that those companies are having to pay penalties for their failure to meet their side of the contract.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Will the Minister take this opportunity to cast some light into the black hole of London Underground's finances? We know that the London Underground subsidy ceases in 2000, that the costs of the Jubilee line extension are up by £100 million this year, and that further losses are to be announced due to the delay in finishing the extension. How does she intend to make up those losses? Will it be by grant, or will they be added to London Underground's balance sheet?

The Secretary of State is already planning to dump the costs of his ridiculous public-private partnership on the new Greater London authority. How much extra is he proposing to add to the mayor's bill, due to his hopeless, incompetent management of London Underground?

Ms Jackson: I would have thought that even the hon. Gentleman had been in post long enough to be able to drop his usual approach, which is not only ill-mannered, but ill-informed. As he well knows, the Government have found an additional £365 million for London Underground, which means that, over the next two years, it will be able to meet the full commitment of £550 million a year, a maintenance bill that was left because of the previous Administration's failure, year on year, adequately to core-fund London Underground.

There were six increases in the proposed final budget for the Jubilee line extension between 1993, when the project was given the go ahead, and May 1997—every time under the hon. Gentleman's Administration. That is another graphic example of their lamentable failure to exercise proper stewardship of London's transport.

Strategic Roads Review

32. **Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): What representations he has received on the publication of the strategic roads review. [58638]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): We have received a number of representations on various aspects of the review following its publication at the end of July.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Minister help me to explain, to those who tell me their objections and share some of my concerns, the apparent conflicts in the Government's policy on widening the M25? How does he square the proposal to widen the M25, substantially on its western side, with the Government's air quality strategy, bearing in mind the fact that, within two years, PM10—particulate matter—levels, for example, will exceed levels stated in that strategy?

On the day on which the Department has published the results of the roads review and a leaflet on the M25 London orbital motorway—which states that the Government reject the option of building out of congestion on the M25, as implementing such proposals leads only to monster motorways—how are we to reconcile the proposal to widen the M25, which I think is unnecessary, with our objectives on air quality and basic objections on building our way out of congestion? I should welcome the Minister's explanation of how that conflict can be reconciled.

Dr. Reid: I shall, as ever, do what I can to assist my hon. Friend. He will be aware that there were proposals—which the Government examined very closely—to widen large sections of the M25. The Government considered and withdrew proposals to widen between junctions 15 and 16 and between junctions 16 and 19. The Government decided to go ahead with specific proposals on the area between junctions 12 and 15, because we have to start by dealing with the situation as it is. Those three junctions are acutely congested, largely because of negligence by the previous Government.

Mr. Mackinlay: Nothing to do with terminal 5?

Dr. Reid: Unfortunately, we inherited the world that was left to us by the previous Government, which was not an ideal one. We decided to go ahead with widening proposals on that section, having rejected proposals on the other two sections.

As my hon. Friend knows, the picture on air quality is complicated. I merely tell him that continued congestion and the stop-go driving of many cars can do very little but contribute to air congestion. As for his useful sedentary question, terminal 5 was in no way taken into account in any of the deliberations. A decision—over which we have no control—will be taken autonomously and independently. It is a quasi-judicial process, which we would not have allowed to enter into our consideration.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that Labour Members used to tell us that widening the M25 was £100 million of motorway madness? It is comforting now to hear him using the same type of words that we used when trying to explain the situation to Labour Members when they were in opposition. Now that the transport White Paper has been launched—providing a photo-opportunity on the tube for the Secretary of State, before he skulked back to his Jaguar—and the roads review has been celebrated, this morning, with the opening of the Newbury bypass, at dead of night and in secret, what are we to expect? What exactly is the Government's transport policy?

After various consultations over 18 months, we are still waiting for policy on buses, road-user charging, vehicle excise duties, car parking taxes, shipping, sustainable distribution, road safety, local transport plans, inland waterways, ports and airports. There has been not a single piece of legislation. When will the Secretary of State give us a real transport policy, rather than policy paralysis in his Department and ever more gridlock on the roads?

Dr. Reid: In 18 months, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department over which he presides produced more common sense, strategic reasoning, detailed plans and money to assist the transport systems than the previous Government managed to do in 18 years. The reason that he was able to list documents and action across a whole range of sectors—including sustainable distribution, local authority plans, congestion charging, buses, shipping and aviation policy—is that the present Government have tackled all those strategic issues

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which lay in abeyance for so long under the previous Government. The people of Britain deserve a better transport system and we are going to give it to them.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Among the representations that the Minister has received, has he had any along the lines of that submitted by the Conservative council adjacent to my constituency, which welcomed the thrust of the strategic transport policy, the roads review and the cutbacks on road projects all over the country, except for the two in its immediate vicinity?

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed. Many councils congratulated us on our approach to an integrated transport policy—even some Conservative councils, not all of which had benefited from a new bypass. I assure my hon. Friend that there are a number of fair-minded Conservative councils. Of course, there are also councils that take the view that it is fine for everyone else to contribute to an integrated transport policy and a better environment, but that they should somehow be excluded from consideration. By and large, however, the proposals by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister that are in the White Paper have been widely welcomed, not only by local authorities, but by the transport industry and, most important, by the people of this country who have waited too long for a decent, reliable, safe transport system.

Freight

33. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What incentives his Department is offering to transfer freight from road to rail; and if he will make a statement. [58639]

34. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): What steps he will take to encourage the increased use of the railways for freight transport. [58640]

35. **Mr. Tom Levitt** (High Peak): What measures he is taking to encourage the transport of freight by rail. [58641]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): The Government want to see more freight move by rail. Last year, we doubled spending on freight grants from £15 million to £30 million and we further increased grants to £40 million. In contrast to the previous Administration, we are spending every penny of it. Next spring, we will have a shadow strategic rail authority to ensure that freight is taken fully into account in planning and developing the rail network.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply. Does he agree that the transfer of freight from road to rail in Wales would be far easier and much improved if there were a direct rail link between Holyhead and Cardiff? In that context, has he had the opportunity to look at the report by Friends of the Earth Cymru strongly advocating that?

Mr. Prescott: We are studying several reports on improving the freight rail system. A number of years ago, I considered the issue of Holyhead in respect of the trans-Pennine link with Europe and the land bridge concept. There are great opportunities and we are providing support for them at the moment.

Mr. Miller: My right hon. Friend knows that, in my constituency, there have been many complaints from businesses and industries that are trying to export, but are unable to exploit the rail freight network. Will he tell us in more detail the precise effects that his announcement will have on rail freight tonnage and the longer-term plans to develop the Government's excellent policy?

Mr. Prescott: We have taken a long-term view, particularly in regard to services to Europe. We renegotiated the channel tunnel link and we are now negotiating with the French authorities to see how we can improve the European services. We have asked Railtrack to look at all possible freight rail systems and the piggyback systems, and we are about to receive a report. We are pleased that a number of companies have increased the number of their wagons and engines, leading to a 12.5 per cent. growth in rail freight services in 1997–98—for the first time in many years.

Mr. Levitt: My right hon. Friend's reply will be welcomed, not least by three groups in my constituency: those communities that live next to main roads; the quarrying industry, which has already announced its intention to increase the amount of freight going by rail; and those campaigning for the restoration of the Buxton to Matlock rail link. Will my right hon. Friend explain to the House how the strategic rail authority will help to take forward the campaign to increase the amount of freight on the rails?

Mr. Prescott: The strategic rail authority will consider a multi-modal approach to maximise the contribution of road and rail interchanges, including park-rail systems, by which cars can connect with main rail systems, or the rail interchange systems, which have increased considerably in the past 12 months. Those are ways in which we can improve the possibilities, alongside increasing grants and encouraging people to move more to rail. There are clear signs of that change, with 12.5 per cent. growth this year. To coin a phrase, we are getting there.

Territorial Army

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): With permission, Madam Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will those Members who are not staying for the statement please leave quietly and quickly?

Mr. Robertson: I should like to make a statement about the future organisation and structure of the Territorial Army.

When I announced the conclusions of our strategic defence review on 8 July, I said that I was determined that the Territorial Army should become more relevant, more usable and better integrated with the rest of our forces. Since then, we have analysed how to put that vision into practice and engaged in detailed and widespread consultation with those most expert on the TA. The decisions that I have taken will produce a tauter, stronger Territorial Army, ready to play its part in facing tomorrow's crises. The changes are faithful to the design that I set out in my statement on 8 July.

We said that we would consult widely, and we have, especially with members of the TA, and the Territorial, Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations. We said that we would listen, and we have, to the many representations that have been made by hon. Members and others. The final structure reflects many substantive changes from the initial proposals circulated for consultation.

The theme of the strategic defence review was modern forces for the modern world. We no longer face a threat to our national survival, but crises and risks are still real and operationally demanding. We can expect little warning of trouble, and we are likely to have to go to the crisis, rather than have it come to us. That places a premium on armed forces that are flexible, useable and ready to react. However, we also need to retain a foundation on which we could generate larger capabilities should a strategic threat to NATO begin to re-emerge.

Tomorrow's Territorial Army will be central to both those needs, like the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force reserves, both of which will grow as a result of the defence review. The TA will no longer be a general reserve for general war in Europe, but a wholly integrated and vital part of a single capability—regular and reserve—for overseas deployment.

We can achieve that by giving the Territorial Army clearly defined operational roles in support of expeditionary forces and structuring it accordingly. There will be a clear shift of emphasis so that we can use the whole of the TA, not just part of it.

We shall make sure that the people who make up the units will be trained and available at the time that we need them. At present, most units are manned only to the extent needed to achieve low levels of readiness. That will change. More units will be held at higher readiness. The previous Government's decisions limited most TA units to only 90 per cent. of their establishments. As a consequence, the strength of the TA today stands at around 54,000. This Government will ensure that the TA of the future is fully resourced for its roles. If needs be, the Government will be prepared to call up the TA in formed units in situations short of a direct threat to the United Kingdom, such as the Gulf war. We are proposing a radical shift away from the TA's traditional image as "weekend warriors", towards a new, more heavyweight role in the world after the cold war. I believe that the TA will welcome such change.

I have set out details in a document that I placed in the Library of the House more than an hour ago. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement, my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces and I have written to hon. Members with an interest in the matter. The letters should have reached them before this statement. I hope that that notice has given hon. Members information that will help them in the following exchange.

The structure set out in our document will, first and foremost, enable tomorrow's TA to meet the operational demands that will be placed on it in future. Secondly, it will encompass a degree of insurance for the unexpected—should a strategic threat to NATO ever re-emerge. There are third and fourth elements to our proposals, too. The reforms will enable the TA to maintain a widespread presence throughout the nations, regions and counties of the United Kingdom. The armed forces must continue to be linked to the local and national communities that they serve, and the TA is vital in achieving that. Many hon. Members have stressed the important role of the Territorial Army as part of the visible presence of the armed forces across the country, and as a source of practical help to local communities. We share those views and took explicit decisions to reflect them fully in our plans.

Fourthly, in the forefront of our minds and of those of many hon. Members has been the need to secure and promote the cadets, and in particular to protect the units which share premises with the TA. I have made that clear on many occasions my strong support for the cadets. They are not a recruiting organisation but a self-standing and successful youth movement. Even so, whereas on average only 8 per cent. of today's Regular Army have been in the TA, 25 per cent. have experience of the cadets. Consequently, our aim has been to protect cadet units as far as possible from disruption during the transition to the new structure. We shall retain many TA centres for cadet use even when they are no longer to be used by Territorial Army units. I assure the House that we will not dispose of a centre until alternative facilities have been provided for the cadets—although some temporary dislocation is inevitable. I have set aside up to £12 million to meet those needs. In addition, I will be allocating £3 million extra to the cadets over the next four years.

In the summer, I told the House that, to meet the requirements that we envisaged placing on the Territorial Army, it would need to be about 40,000 strong. Following our detailed analysis and consultation, we have decided that a modest increase in that number is needed. The result will be a TA of 41,200. In other words, that is a reduction of 13,000 on today's strength. To put that into perspective, last year we lost almost that number through natural wastage alone. In total, only 87 of Britain's 455 TA centres will close outright. A further 27 will be retained for the cadets. Four in every five centres will therefore remain.

The decisions will fulfil both the country's operational need and the armed forces' role in the communities that they serve and in which they live. The outcome is not some number determined by an arbitrary exercise in cost reduction, but is securely rooted in a thorough analysis of policy and military need. It has the full backing of the head of the Army, the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Roger Wheeler, and the whole Army Board. In that respect, as in its operational justification, it is no different from the rest of the strategic defence review.

I know that some would have wished us to go further and to maintain the reserves at much higher levels than we have proposed, just in case; but the nation simply does not need such large numbers and I cannot justify them either militarily, or as a Minister spending the money of taxpayers. To be frank, the self-esteem of the TA is not likely to survive if it has no real military purpose and is stuck frozen in some cold war glacier. However, we have not presumed that we can predict the future, or that it will be a continuation of the patterns of the recent past, so the TA will continue to be a basis for the regeneration of larger reserve forces, should the country ever need them.

We have also taken pains to implement change in a way that is sensitive to the pride and commitment of volunteers and to their regimental traditions and ethos. Tomorrow's Territorial Army will retain substantial, though reduced, numbers of infantry. In future, there will be 15 new infantry battalions and they will choose their own names. I am pleased to tell the House that, within those, all existing TA infantry cap-badge affiliations will be maintained at company level; not a single cap badge will be lost.

Traditions in the TA yeomanry will also be maintained through a nationwide representation of yeomanry squadrons. We shall also ensure that those squadrons will have a real job to do and strong links to the regular regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps. TA yeomanry squadrons will have access to the same equipment as their regular counterparts, including the Challenger 2 main battle tank, and to the major armoured training areas.

We have also reflected carefully on the recommendation of the Select Committee on Defence on the nuclear, biological and chemical role of the Territorial Army. The SDR included the creation of a regular unit—a joint Army-RAF organisation—to improve significantly our current capability in that important area. Under initial proposals, the TA yeomanry would have contributed a single squadron to that unit; but I have decided, in light of the Committee's observations, to retain two squadrons of TA yeomanry devoted to the support of regular forces in that role.

Tomorrow's TA structure will reflect a greater emphasis on specialists and units of the supporting arms and services than has previously been the case. Those will provide, as now, the full range of combat and combat services support for a military deployment: signallers, artillery, air defence, logistics and engineers and, of course, medical services. Both regular and reserve medical services were, I regret, neglected by the previous Government. We shall, therefore, seek to increase substantially—by more than 2,000 soldiers—the manpower available to the volunteer Army medical service.

The strategic defence review was also crucially about people. Volunteer service will be more demanding in future, but it will continue to provide rewarding opportunities unparalleled in most other walks of life. There will also be opportunities to contribute to our new mission of defence diplomacy overseas. The TA of the future will be an enterprise to which we wish to attract the best. A new recruitment campaign will ensure that that message is clearly conveyed.

Retention is just as important. In recent years, for example, up to a third of the TA's recruits have been leaving within a year of joining; that must change. Therefore, there will be a package of improvements to personnel management in the Territorial Army, in particular for individual members of the TA who volunteer for service in Bosnia and elsewhere abroad. We are overhauling antiquated arrangements for keeping track of individual TA members. A new reserves training and mobilisation centre will start training individuals for overseas deployments from April next year. We shall improve education and training opportunities and ensure, through the provision of personal development records, that the value of the individual's experience and training in service is recognised, which will be to the benefit of the individual and, we hope, of his or her civilian employer.

The Territorial Army has a first-class record of responding to the need for change. As an essential part of the Army throughout this century, it has always had to be flexible in size and in organisation. It expanded to meet both world wars. Since then, it has been disbanded, re-raised, reduced and expanded again to meet developments in warfare and a changing threat.

The changes that I am announcing today will mean that, for the first time in many years, tomorrow's Territorial Army will have a clear role and purpose for the future. Tomorrow's Territorial Army will be better manned, trained, supported and integrated, and will be able to meet the challenges of the world after the cold war. In short, it will be a Territorial Army fit for the future—both valuable and valued by the whole country. I commend the reforms to the House.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): First, I thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in letting me have a look at the proposals at 12 o'clock, which was helpful. I am grateful to him for that. I wish that I could say the same about their content. However, I am afraid that our worst expectations have just been confirmed.

The Territorial Army is to be cut from an establishment of 59,500 to 41,204—a cut of 31 per cent. The number of TA centres is to be cut from 455 to 341—a cut of 25 per cent. The Secretary of State thinks that he has made a brave decision, but it is one that his predecessors resisted. The Ministry of Defence has been trying to sell this downgrading of the TA to Ministers for years, and has finally found a Minister to whom it has succeeded in selling that proposal.

Such criticism does not just come from the Opposition—this is not a party political matter. The proposals have been criticised by Government Back Benchers, the Select Committee on Defence, the media, the Territorial Army, the TAVRAs, the Director of Infantry, the Secretary of State for Scotland, many retired officers and many regular soldiers, who are not allowed to speak but whose opinions are well known privately.

Those drastic cuts are being imposed at a time when we are beginning to realise that the end of the cold war has not brought a new era of peace and security. Our

[Mr. John Maples]

armed forces are heavily committed in Northern Ireland and Bosnia. We nearly became involved in Kosovo, and may still become so. The Gulf has been looking very dangerous recently, and who can be sure that armed intervention will not be needed? What about the threats that no one has yet even thought about?

Let us look at the proposals in a little more detail. First, I wish to refer to the few things that we can wholeheartedly support. We wholly endorse the reintroduction of the two Yeomanry squadrons as part of our nuclear, biological and chemical capability. The 2,000 extra posts in the Royal Army Medical Corps and the new 500-strong ambulance regiment are welcome. Speaking personally, I am delighted that the Stratford-upon-Avon TA centre and Signal Squadron have been reprieved. The commitment to better training and equipment is very welcome, but we shall watch to see that that happens. The strategic defence review was full of cuts today for better equipment tomorrow, and that must not happen to the TA.

I am delighted that the cadets are not to suffer the same fate as the TA. *[Interruption.]* The former Minister for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), is obviously so embarrassed by the statement that he feels compelled to leave the Chamber. *[Interruption.]* We missed the right hon. Gentleman, and we are delighted that he has returned to the Front Bench. I am delighted that the cadets will not suffer the same cuts as the TA, because their role in recruitment is vital.

The Secretary of State somehow pretends that it has fallen to him to reconfigure the TA after the end of the cold war, but this process has been going on for years. We agreed that the TA should be relevant to the post-cold war environment, and that is what we ensured. The TA has evolved significantly during the past few years and, frankly, it is insulting to the TA for the Secretary of State to pretend otherwise, or to describe those serving as "weekend warriors". Those weekend warriors are, as we speak, serving in Bosnia and Northern Ireland, and their lives are in danger on our behalf. The few good things that the Secretary of State proposes are largely building on what we started.

One of the effects of closing 114 TA centres will be that the TA will now be confined to our cities and large towns. Rural areas do not seem to be on the Government's map. There will be only one TA centre in Norfolk and only one in Lincolnshire, which is also a large county. There will be only one unit in central Wales between Wrexham in the north and Carmarthen in the south. In North Yorkshire, three centres are to close, leaving only one in Scarborough. What does that say to people in rural Britain? They are told that the TA is not for them and that, as in so many matters, the Government do not care about rural England. I use the word "England" advisedly because the highly critical letter of August from the Secretary of State for Scotland to the Secretary of State for Defence has resulted in reprieves for several TA centres in Scotland.

Will the Secretary of State answer a few questions? Will he confirm that the TA infantry is to be cut from more than 16,000 to 7,100, that the TA yeomanry is to be cut from 2,500 to 1,300 and that the strength of the Royal Engineers will be cut from 5,900 to 2,700? Will he confirm that the Royal Artillery will be cut from 3,900 to 3,000, that the Royal Logistics Corps will be cut from 19 to 14 regiments and lose a third of its manpower and that the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers will lose one of their five battalions and a quarter of their men? Will he tell the House whether the Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets has endorsed those cuts?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that his new figure for the TA establishment of 41,200 includes 3,500 in university officer training corps and more than 6,000 specialists? The Select Committee on Defence recommended that those categories should be excluded from that establishment. If they are, is not its true strength little more than 31,000? Does the Secretary of State think that that is an adequate reserve?

The truth of the matter cannot be hidden by the glossy booklets and heavy spin that accompany the announcement. This is all about money. The SDR imposed cuts and efficiency targets on the Ministry of Defence which it cannot meet. It is scrabbling around for any pound that it can save, and the TA seems to be a vulnerable target. The cuts in themselves will not save much; the prospect of selling off the 114 so-called surplus properties must have been too tempting to resist.

I suspect that that is why the review has been conducted in such secrecy. The Secretary of State said that a consultation paper was circulated. It was not circulated to Members of Parliament whose constituencies might be affected and it was not circulated to the public—their opinion was not sought. Circulation was so confined that the document—uniquely for the Government and the Ministry—was not even leaked.

If there was a genuine consultation exercise, why did the Select Committee feel it necessary to write to the Secretary of State on 2 November to complain that the TA and the TAVRAs felt that they had been excluded from the process? Why was it necessary for the Commander-in-Chief of Land Command to circulate a letter threatening to court-martial any soldier who even discussed the matter with his Member of Parliament? Any consultation was very narrow, and when the Select Committee reopens its inquiry, it will have its suspicions confirmed.

The TA is our insurance policy against a national emergency. At a time when we have a small Regular Army of little more than 100,000, that reserve becomes even more important. The Government's decision on the TA is dictated by a short-term policy for short-term savings, and we could pay dearly for it in the longer run. The TA is a very British institution based on volunteers, service and patriotism. It has given and continues to give valuable service to our country, but today is a black day for the Territorial Army. The Secretary of State has made a mistake today for which he will pay politically. I only hope that our country will not also have to pay the next time that we find ourselves in a major crisis.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for beginning his minor rant with a commendation because we provided information on some of our proposals in advance. The areas that he singled out are among the most important components of the reform of the Territorial Army that I have presented to Parliament today.

First, let me deal with the issue of weekend warriors. I was not being derogatory about the Territorial Army. I was simply saying that, if the public perceive members

of the TA to be weekend warriors, involved in training for roles that are no longer relevant, that does not work in favour of the proud and professional people who give of their time and trouble. I believe that, by giving them a modernised role, giving them a vision for the future and giving them a usability that they have never had, we shall rebuild morale in the Territorial Army from the chaos that was left to us to clean up.

Obviously, although we gave the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) the document at 12 o'clock today, he has still not sufficiently understood the figures in it. I shall bear that in mind next time, and perhaps allocate more time for him to do so. He mentioned an establishment of 59,000 in the Territorial Army. That is at best a notional and technical figure. My predecessor, Michael Portillo, did not even fund the Territorial Army to the 56,000 level, let alone the 59,000 level. As I said in my statement, the actual strength of the Territorial Army is 54,000. Therefore, the reduction is 13,000 on the basis of its existing strength, and scaremongering with irrelevant figures does not help the debate. Four out of five TA centres throughout the country will remain open. I believe that that outcome takes into account the views that we heard on the Territorial Army and on the cadets.

What a strange lack of memory the hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon has. I know that he was out of the House for a whole Parliament, and I know that he was once a Treasury Minister, but his selective memory does not help us to have a constructive debate about this great service. Under the previous Government, and since the end of the cold war, the three Ministers who were responsible for the Ministry of Defence reduced the Territorial Army by 20,000 over 10 years. The hon. Gentleman therefore has a bit of a cheek to criticise me for trimming 13,000 from the Territorial Army.

The hon. Gentleman criticised our treatment of rural England, but that criticism will not stand a moment's examination of the maps in the document. In operational and footprint terms our proposals tell an extremely good story. The hon. Gentleman's allegations that Scotland got a special reprieve are a cheap jibe, in light of the fact that I gave him figures about the regional distribution of the Territorial Army and the reductions. The new establishment in Scotland is 75 per cent. of the previous strength; the national average is 76 per cent. Therefore Scotland is exactly on the national average.

The London area—which will get three extra infantry companies—is the one that has done best out of the add-backs that we made to bring the figure up to 41,200. We have put back an infantry company in the north-west; one infantry company in the west midlands; and one infantry company, a company of the Royal Military Police and a field hospital in the north-east of England. There is, therefore, no partiality involved in the process.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon itemises several areas where there have been reductions. Of course there have been reductions—I said that we had trimmed the numbers while increasing the role, training and integrity of the Territorial Army. However, the hon. Gentleman did not mention the addition of 2,000 to the defence medical services—an initial cut for which his Government were responsible.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon asked whether the plan had the whole-hearted backing—

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The cuts.

Mr. Robertson: The full package has been endorsed, not only by the Army Board, but by Brigadier Richard Holmes, Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets, who made that public statement only a few minutes ago, at the Ministry of Defence.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the OTCs are included. Of course they are: they are part and parcel of the Territorial Army now, and into the future. The hon. Gentleman made a variety of nit-picking criticisms. However, as we are talking about authorities consulted on the review and the conclusions reached, he should bear in mind the words today of Field Marshal Lord Vincent of Coleshill, the last but one Chief of the Defence Staff and a great friend of the reserve forces of this land. He said:

"the strategic environment has changed very significantly over the last decade. It is therefore essential that the Territorial Army is organised and allocated operational tasks in a manner that is clearly consistent with our new defence priorities. We simply have to ensure that the Territorial Army remains relevant and useable, or it will increasingly lack credibility in the years ahead. I believe that the Strategic Defence Review, followed by the extensive consultation process, has achieved these important objectives."

Senior and distinguished members of the British Army endorse what I have proposed today, and so too, I believe, will the country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the House that that one exchange has taken 30 minutes. We must have brisk questions and answers from Back Benchers and the Secretary of State—I am sure that he will oblige—if I am to call everyone.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Today is obviously a bad day, and it is a black day for Chorley. I listened to the Secretary of State's criteria and, according to those criteria, Chorley TA centre should not be closed. It has nothing to do with some threat from Russia—far from it. I have only just read that our Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers 101 Battalion is to go to Wales. Why will it not remain in Chorley? I have been told that the cadet forces will remain untouched, but not in Chorley's case—the building that they use is marked down for closure.

I presume that something has gone wrong: either the Secretary of State has not been given the necessary information or Chorley has been treated differently. I do not believe that this is a political decision: it must be a mistake. I implore the Secretary of State to look seriously at what has happened. Will he meet a delegation from Chorley to discuss what will happen to the cadet force and why the battalion headquarters are to be moved from Chorley? When Cheshire—I have nothing against Cheshire—has nine TA centres and there is not one TA centre left in south Lancashire, there is something tragically wrong. Something has gone wrong with the formula because, according to the criteria, there is no way that Chorley's centre should close. I plead with the Secretary of State to meet us and to reverse his decision.

Mr. Robertson: I respect my hon. Friend's strong feelings. In any reform or redesign of the Territorial Army

[Mr. Robertson]

there will clearly be losers as well as winners. I feel as pained as many others about the decisions that have been taken, but such decisions are in the greater interests of the Territorial Army.

My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will certainly meet my hon. Friend, not to change the decision—the overall package has been thought through very carefully—but to consider how best we can ensure that the area's cadets are accommodated properly and how the Territorial Army soldiers currently based in Chorley may find a proper career in the other units remaining in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I also thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in allowing me to see the documents and the statement in advance?

Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's skill in presentation and the very welcome qualitative changes that he has announced, does he accept that today's statement will cause great dismay and disappointment to those whose units are to be disbanded? Does he accept also that, regardless of how it is described, the Territorial Army is to be reduced by a third or, at best—according to the Secretary of State's figures—by 25 per cent? Some 25 per cent. of TA drill halls will be sold to developers. With a reduction of that kind, is it not inevitable that the TA's ability to reinforce Regular Army infantry and yeomanry units will be reduced substantially?

Will there not be an erosion of the unique links between the community and the armed services that the TA provides? Will not these announcements reduce the ability of the Territorial Army to give support to the civilian community in time of emergency? Finally, how many of the senior TA officers who threatened to resign because of their anxiety about the inadequacy of the consultation process does the Secretary of State think will endorse his proposals without qualification?

Mr. Robertson: We are speaking about one British Army. The Territorial Army is a component of that, but the country must properly look at the whole of the British Army. General Sir Roger Wheeler, the Chief of the General Staff, is the head of the entire Army. In the strategic defence review we examined the global issue. The consequences of the defence review are also being announced today.

I am uncertain how many of the TA colonels will endorse or live with all the proposals, but at every stage they have been properly consulted and talked to. I anticipate that the British Army will recognise, as it always has in the past, that ultimately it is for Ministers of the Crown to make the decisions.

I made these decisions on the basis of a military judgment given to me by the Chief of the General Staff and the Army Board. At the press conference before we came to the House today, I made it clear, along with the Chief of the General Staff and the Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets, that we were as one with respect to the proposed shape of the Territorial Army.

Morale in the Territorial Army will not be eroded, because the TA is being strengthened. Its role is being refreshed. It is being given greater utility and usability. In the future, it will have the right training and equipment to be in the right place at the right time. The thousands of people across the country who give their time and effort diligently in the interests of the country will recognise that this is the way forward, as part of one Army.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I warmly welcome the decision to increase the Army medical service personnel by 2,000. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that will have a considerable impact in correcting the problems that we inherited from the previous Government, who cut the armed forces medical services in all three services?

I particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to move the headquarters of the TA armed forces medical services to my constituency, York, and to move the field training centre for the armed forces medical services close to York, to Strensall.

Mr. Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for his commendation. I know that he has had differences of opinion with me in the past, but we have made a conscious decision to locate the headquarters of the medical services in York. With the relocation of the Defence Vetting Agency to York, he can be proud of the job that he has done—the representations that he has made—on behalf of his constituents, who can be proud of him.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Is the Secretary of State aware that, behind all the glitz of the new Labour modern speak, the cuts that he announced today are old-fashioned cuts in the Territorial Army across the land? Is he further aware that, in striking down the 10th Battalion Parachute Regiment, he is losing to the reserve forces a dedicated team of able, relevant and well-recruited volunteers whom I had the privilege of joining last weekend on exercise? Why axe them down, when the other component of the joint rapid deployment force—3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines—is to double the number of reserves that it recruits, while the paras are to be cut from 900 to 330? These are old-fashioned Labour cuts.

Mr. Robertson: I do not think that that is a fair representation, as the hon. Gentleman, who is usually fair, will recognise. A large number of defence jobs are located in his constituency. We have looked carefully at the role of the Parachute Regiment, in its regular configuration and in its Territorial Army configuration. I am satisfied that we will have an adequate number of people to perform the role that that regiment fulfils with great distinction in the Army.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the TA unit in my constituency at Greenhithe is one of those scheduled for closure. He will also be aware that that unit carries out an extremely important bomb disposal function for the area. Can he assure me and the members of my unit that that expertise and valuable function will not be lost, but will be moved to other units?

Mr. Robertson: I do not want to lose any expertise or function that is carried out by the TA where it is relevant to today's forces. My hon. Friend may well be disappointed at one aspect of this general review, but I

hope that he will recognise that, in the part of the world that he represents, the TA's general footprint will still be there and that the TA will still do a good job on behalf of the nation.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, when proposals were made to me for reducing the size of the TA at the end of the cold war, when there was obvious justification for making some reductions, I judged the figure of 60,000 or thereabouts to be the minimum at which the TA could be sustained and its national presence and role maintained? The right hon. Gentleman will, therefore, understand why I believe that his announcement is profoundly unwise. It is based on a judgment of the world as he sees it at this moment. The particularly serious aspect of this is that he is proposing not only these reductions, but the sale of drill halls, so that when it is evident, as it may be in the future, that the cuts were unwise, it will be extremely difficult to reverse them.

Mr. Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman, who occupied my job, made a judgment at that time about the size of the TA in the circumstances then prevailing. I have had to do exactly the same, and times do change. We have only to look at the events of the past seven days to begin to realise just how quickly we have to react in times of crisis, and how, increasingly, we will have to do so in the future.

I must also say to the right hon. Gentleman, quite gently, that my predecessor, Michael Portillo, chose to fund only 90 per cent. of the figure that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about because he believed that a figure lower than 60,000 was justifiable in the then circumstances. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has listened to the words of Field Marshal Lord Vincent, which I have read out, because he served the right hon. Gentleman with distinction.

Times change, threats change, and we must reconfigure, not just the regular but the reserve forces, to be ready for the future. That is what we have done, that is the military judgment, and I stand by that.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): As my right hon. Friend has paid great attention to the footprint argument, does he agree that East Sussex appears somewhat devoid of any footprint, save for one unit in Eastbourne? In particular, will he assure me that there will be some means by which civic occasions and other such functions can be serviced by some form of military presence, which is so well received by my constituents?

Mr. Robertson: I am sure that we can consider how civic occasions can be dealt with, because that is part of the footprint of the armed forces. My hon. Friend may well be disappointed at the closure of the Hastings centre, but we shall retain it as a centre for the cadet unit that uses it. Clearly, the cadets' future role will be important both in the life of Hastings and, I hope, in the wider community.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I join others in thanking the Secretary of State for making the documents available at noon today. It is a courtesy that could be observed by other Departments. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman encourages that example.

Throughout the process, has not the argument been about the highest and the lowest bidder, and have we not reached some form of compromise? In the north of Scotland, we welcome the fact that two companies and eight platoons remain, although we would have much preferred to retain a battalion, but that is better than we had originally expected.

However, my constituents and I will be bitterly disappointed at the decision to remove RAF Squadrons 236 and 237 from Kinloss and Lossiemouth, as they are important engineering aspects of the TA and they have given huge and invaluable service to the community in civilian disasters, such as the floods that we had last year.

Those squadrons have been based at RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth at no expense whatever, and I believe that the decision should be reconsidered—perhaps there should be a combined squadron to serve the north of Scotland—because they are vital, given the geographic area that they are expected to cover.

Mr. Robertson: Far from hearing the apprehensions that have been expressed in some quarters about the TA in Scotland, I listened—very carefully, as the hon. Lady perhaps expected—to the voices that we heard in Scotland, including the strong and convincing voice of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is a personal and professional friend.

I can understand that, in the hon. Lady's constituency case—she is talking about a broader constituency, I presume—there will be disappointment at the closing of the two squadrons. The TA centre in Elgin will remain, however, and her constituency has been the beneficiary of a new RAF squadron coming into RAF Lossiemouth from Germany. That will boost the local economy and will increase the footprint of the armed forces in that area. I believe that we have the right shape for the reserve forces throughout Scotland, and they will serve Scotland well.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the criticism from the Select Committee on Defence was considered, unlike the rant from the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), and one that we will explore further? Does he also agree that we welcome the restoration of the yeomanry nuclear, biological and chemical unit, which is fundamental to our response to the kind of terrorist incident that can take place? Will he reassure the House that his figure of 41,200 is real—unlike the notional figures of 59,000 and, going further back, 60,000, which were never funded by the previous Government—and the number that we intend to achieve?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend makes a good and valuable point. The figure that we have announced on the Territorial Army will be fully funded, which will be a change from figures that have been bandied about today and were bandied about by the previous Government. That will be well noted by the public.

I take my hon. Friend's point about the considered view of the Select Committee on Defence. I paid particular attention to what it said on TA numbers and on provisions for NBC protection, and I hope that the Committee—which will no doubt give this statement the scrutiny that it gives all other statements—will recognise that it made a valuable contribution to the consultation.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Secretary of State intends to close the unit in Cobham—detachments

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and of the cadet force—which is extremely bad news. First, is that closure taking place not for operational reasons, but simply because it is likely that that centre will be valuable on the property market? Secondly, had he noted the reply from the Prime Minister to me on 15 June about the activities of the civil contingencies committee, in which I anticipated the remarks of the Secretary of State for Scotland about the role that the TA could play in alleviating any of the problems arising from the millennium bug? Will he comment on that? What reply did he give to his colleague?

Mr. Robertson: I refute entirely the allegation that we have closed any of the centres on the basis of property value; indeed, if that had been the objective, an entirely different map would be before the House. We have looked carefully and in enormous detail at operational need in relation to the TA. That will have consequential results in respect of vacant property, which will feed into the defence budget and help to finance the global budget of the Department.

The hon. Gentleman makes a point about the problems that might be experienced at the millennium. That is a serious issue in which the Government take a particular interest, but the TA is an integral part of the armed forces and it would, if required, be available with the rest of the armed forces in any civil emergency, either actual or potential.

None of the changes that we have announced today will affect our ability to respond to any such request. We have shown that we intend to maintain a widespread TA presence throughout the UK to maintain the operational coherence of all our forces, and if there is a problem we shall be able to deal with it.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I warmly welcome the commitment that my right hon. Friend and his ministerial team have shown in giving the TA a future and a significant operational role. I welcome their willingness to listen and consult, which is in marked contrast to the previous Government. I further welcome the retention of the Army cadet force in Dunfermline. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the majority of recruits to the regular armed forces come from the cadet force, not the TA? Does he also agree that a priority for this Government must be to make up the cut of one third that the previous Government made in the Regular Army by taking all possible action to encourage recruitment to the regular fores?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is right, and I thank her for her comments. Army recruitment is at its best level now since 1993—17 per cent. up on last year. It is an indication from those who would join the Army that they see a future in it because of the strategic defence review. I welcome my hon. Friend's comments about the cadet centre in Dunfermline. She is right to say that, although the cadet force is a youth movement and is not designed for recruitment, it gives young people in many parts of the country a flavour of the forces that will tempt them into a satisfying and high-quality career later in life. My hon. Friend has helped throughout this exercise, and I thank her for the energy and effort that she has put into it. By any standards, we have listened more to the outside world and the TA than any previous Government. I presume that, as a result, our proposals will get the support that they merit.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): The proposals are open to all sorts of criticism, but in the case of my constituency they are ignorant. Page 75 of the so-called fact sheet places Shirley in Birmingham, whereas it is an important part of the borough of Solihull. I went to camp this summer with Army cadets from Shirley; I will see the air cadets on Thursday this week and the sea cadets on Friday. They will be devastated to know that the TA centre at Haslucks Green road will close completely. Will the Secretary of State write to me about where he proposes that those cadets should now parade?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces is willing to discuss that matter with the hon. Gentleman, because we have absolutely guaranteed that accommodation will be made available to replace existing cadet centres. I hope that he will tell the cadets that he mentioned—I dare say that they value the contact that they have with him—that we shall spend an extra £3 million on the cadets over the next four years because we believe in their value both to the community and to the armed forces. Their relocation will be a matter of consultation, in which the hon. Gentleman is welcome to be involved. I guarantee that suitable premises will be found.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I acknowledge the Secretary of State's courtesy in sending me a letter and documentation before his statement, and I support his strategy for the new century. May I thank him and his Department for the decision to keep open the Queensferry centre? The whole of Deeside will thank him for that, whether they be the voluntary services that use it or the soldiers themselves. May I also acknowledge my right hon. Friend's decision to keep the Royal Welch Fusiliers' 3rd Battalion of the Territorial Army at Wrexham? North Wales recruits strongly for the Royal Welch Fusiliers, and people throughout north Wales will thank the Secretary of State for listening.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for recognising that the decision that we took was right and proper in the circumstances. The TA is a good area for recruitment into the regular forces. That was one of the factors that we took into account in the reconfiguration of the TA. Overall, the package that we have put together satisfies the operational requirements of the Army, and is endorsed by the Chief of the General Staff and the Army Board. It will be recognised by the country as a suitable future for the whole of the TA.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I declare an interest as the squadron leader of the Warwickshire and Worcestershire Yeomanry, although I see from these proposals that I shall not hold that appointment for much longer. What measures will the Secretary of State take to ensure that, in future, there is a sufficient number of senior TA officers at the top of the chain of command who are capable of giving advice to Ministers, so that such a stitch-up will not take place in the future?

Mr. Robertson: I am sure that we shall be able to attract the right quality of officers and other personnel

into the Territorial Army, and that that will be easier to achieve at all levels now that the TA can look forward to a more usable and relevant role.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): It was a great relief to read the report, because I fully expected the centre in Durham to be closed. It was unthinkable that there would be no infantry presence in Durham in the near future. I thank the Secretary of State for that and for the fact that the Burma Band and Bugles of the Light Infantry will be retained. That is very important, because it would have been a terrible loss to Durham county if such a magnificent group of musicians had been disbanded.

I did not understand what my right hon. Friend meant when he referred to the names of the new battalions. He seemed to say that they could pick their own names. Will the battalion that will be based at the new headquarters in Durham be able to take the title of 7 Light Infantry, as it has been known through history?

Mr. Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for the proposals. I hope that it will be noticed that the pain and the pleasure are evenly shared in the House, both geographically and politically. We have sought to achieve a sensible balance that is consistent with the operational objectives of the strategic defence review.

The new regiments are described by their geographic titles, but it will be within their power to make recommendations to us about what they want their names to be. That is a sensible way of going about it, rather than commanding from the centre what the new titles should be.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The United States Chief of the General Staff recently said that he needed all his reserves, which are larger than the Regular Army. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the cuts fall most heavily on those elements of the Territorial Army that cannot be found from civilian life, especially the infantry and yeomanry, for which there is no civilian equivalent and which would take the longest to rebuild? Will he also confirm that, although the 15 remaining infantry battalions may be allowed to recruit to their new establishments, those establishments are configured in such a way that they could not be deployed as a formed unit within any reasonable time scale? Will he confirm that the largest cut in the infantry falls on the paras, who are the most ready for war?

Mr. Robertson: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to forget his main point, but he rescued himself at the last minute. The hon. Gentleman has a good track record on, and a great interest in, the reserve forces. I have responsibility for all the armed forces, and for ensuring that they are ready for day-to-day operations, in which our country is engaged much more than even the American forces. It is not possible to make easy comparisons between what the reserves do in the United States of America and what our reserve forces are expected to do.

Our reserves must be much more usable, at a much higher level of readiness and trained to a much higher level of skill than the reserve forces of the United States of America. As we have seen in Kosovo, Iraq and a number of other places, we have a larger proportion of our forces engaged in day-to-day operations than the United States and practically every other country. That is why we want to make our Territorial Army much more usable and relevant.

We have considered the position of the Parachute Regiment with enormous care. The regiment has a very effective outside lobby, including a number of close friends of mine, and the decision was not made lightly. I have to balance the judgment of those outside, and those who happen to be involved in the interests of particular regiments, with the general advice that I receive and the decisions that I, as Secretary of State, must make on behalf of all our armed forces and of the country. I believe that my judgment, and the judgment of my military advisers, is right.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and, in particular, on his wise decision to site the headquarters of the London Battalion in Battersea, along with four companies of the London Regiment and two of the Royal Green Jackets. May I urge him to draw attention to the record of the London Regiment, a TA regiment that is rooted in its community and reflects its ethnic composition, with 15 per cent. of members drawn from ethnic minorities in the headquarters company in Battersea and 20 per cent. in the company in Balham, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox)?

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's words of welcome. I think that he and others will recognise that we have done the right thing in London and elsewhere. He is right to say that we have taken account of a variety of factors, including the ability to recruit from parts of the community with which we may not have had such success in the past.

I hope that it will be noticed that we have included three additional infantry companies in the London plan. One will be from the Royal Green Jackets, one from the London Scottish Regiment and one from the London Irish Regiment. I think that that will prove to be a popular decision.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): Can the Secretary of State confirm that there will be only one TA battalion in Wales, not two as at present? His document refers only to a Wales battalion. Will he also confirm that nine of the 31 TA centres in Wales are being closed? That does not reflect his claim that four out of five centres would remain in Wales; two out of three will remain—not the average relating to the United Kingdom as a whole. The recruiting record in Wales is outstanding, but I believe that the Secretary of State's proposals will seriously diminish it.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman, normally a very fair individual, is wrong in this instance. Of all the parts of the country, Wales is doing best in terms of the numbers retained. It currently has a strength of 2,982, and its proposed establishment is 2,547. Whereas the national average is 76 per cent. of the previous average, in Wales the figure is 85 per cent. Wales has done extremely well out of the restructuring.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Territorial Army had an important role to play in Northampton in rescuing people

[Ms Sally Keeble]

when more than 2,000 homes were flooded at Easter? Its lifesaving work has not been publicly recognised. I assure my right hon. Friend that his decision to keep the TA centre in Northampton will be warmly welcomed by a town that understands the important role that the TA has to play in crises not just abroad, but at home.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I, too, pay tribute to the valuable social role undertaken by many units of the TA. I hope that, by restructuring and revitalising it and boosting its morale, I am giving those units collectively a pat on the back.

At the beginning of my statement, I made the critical point that the reduction in actual numbers is only fractionally more than the natural wastage in the TA in one year. Far from attacking the TA, as some irresponsible people have suggested, we are strengthening its role. Those who have praised and admired its work, as my hon. Friend has in the past, will have even more cause to do so in the future.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I, too, welcome the personalised letter that all hon. Members have received from the Secretary of State. Does he not think that mine would have been of a little more use if it had been honest enough to acknowledge the fact that the Territorial Army centre in Trowbridge, the county town of Wiltshire, was to close? My constituents will be confused about why no mention of the centre has been made in my letter, although, according to the document that has been produced, it is scheduled to close?

Does the Secretary of State not understand the devastating effect that that will have on a rural community such as west Wiltshire? The centre provides a focal point for the local community, for young people, for training young people in many of the arts, such as leadership, and for maintaining a serious career, which is good for the whole community, not just for the young people who try to join the TA.

Mr. Robertson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's thanks for the fact that he received the letter. The detail about which he talks is in the document. The letter alerted him to the fact that it would be in the Vote Office, so the information was there.

We have tried to do our best. Few Departments and, indeed, few previous Governments have gone to the trouble of giving hon. Members information in advance of statements. I am sorry that that information, however the hon. Gentleman got it, is bad for him in terms of the specific constituency, but I assure him that we have ensured that the overall TA footprint is still there in Wiltshire, and that there are still relevant centres close by, which will give people who wish to volunteer the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Army in Lancaster will face the future positively and loyally, even in the face of decisions that have reduced the headquarters of a battalion to the status of a company, which is largely based in Barrow—the battalion being based in Preston? Does he understand that the Member of Parliament for Lancaster and Wyre is more demoralised than it may be, and that I require a written explanation and rational justification for the changes that have taken place, which will not only say why those decisions have taken place, but give a real commitment to the Army in Lancaster? Can that justification be phrased rather better than the warm words and pats on the head that I have so far received in response to speeches in the House and many letters to the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is a decent and fair person and makes a point on behalf of his constituency. He may wish to express that here today, but it is impossible to restructure, to reorganise and to modernise the Territorial Army if there is not going to be a single casualty affecting some constituency. I assure him that there will still be opportunities in Lancashire and near Lancaster for people to volunteer and to serve their country through the Territorial Army.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): In disbanding the company in Laurencekirk, will he confirm that, should volunteers from Laurencekirk wish to continue to make a commitment to the Territorial Army, they will be able to do so in neighbouring companies? Will he confirm what the Minister for the Armed Forces said at a meeting: if we find that there are practical consequences for the cadet force that were not foreseen in the statement, he will listen to representations?

Mr. Robertson: We are always willing to listen. The answer to the first question—can people who are being moved seek places in neighbouring countries?—*[Interruption.]* Neighbouring companies, not neighbouring countries. Norway is probably closer than England to Laurencekirk, but those people will be able to find a role in neighbouring companies. We shall be willing at every stage to consider constructive criticism of and suggestions about the plan, and indeed about the strategic defence review. The situation is not static, as the threat is not static and the unexpected can always happen. We have to be able to evolve our regular and reserve forces in a manner that serves the country best, which is why we shall keep it all constantly under review.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): My right hon. Friend's proposals will receive a warm welcome in the hillsides and vales of Wales. The news of the retention of two viable battalions there to play a crucial new role in fulfilling the modern role of our armed forces will be very welcome. Is he aware that, last Friday, in Edinburgh, General Wesley Clark, NATO Supreme Allied Commander, described the strategic defence review as a remarkable achievement that should be used as a model for all other NATO countries? Today's proposals are an integral part of that review.

Mr. Robertson: I do not know whether I should be more flattered by the fact that the reform will be welcomed in the vales and valleys of Wales or by General Wesley Clark's commendation of them last week at the North Atlantic Assembly. I am looking not for plaudits or commendations, but to do what is right for the United Kingdom and for the armed forces, who serve us all.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): As the Secretary of State's hon. Friends have failed to do so, may I thank him

for coming to Edinburgh to the annual meeting of the North Atlantic Assembly, at considerable inconvenience for himself, having to fly from Ypres and meeting so many of our European friends, the delegates at that conference? However, may I also remind him that Mr. Solana, the NATO Secretary-General, in addressing the conference, not only reinforced his comments on the training of reservists having to be at the highest standards but said that ever more nations would have to rely on reservists if they were to be able to meet some of NATO's modern requirements and the surprise aspects of what NATO troops might have to do in the future? Today's statement seems to run entirely contrary to that advice.

Mr. Robertson: No, it does not—exactly to the contrary. Secretary-General Solana was absolutely correct in saying that we will have to rely more on our reservists, and we shall do so. We are therefore modernising and restructuring the Territorial Army, so that we can use its members, and more of them, more often in the future. I think that Secretary-General Solana—who has himself praised our defence review and commended it to other NATO countries—would recognise that the United Kingdom, more than most countries, has made our forces more relevant to the type of problems that NATO will face in the future.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his warm words at the beginning of his remarks, and for the help that he gave me at the reception in the old Parliament building, at Edinburgh, in meeting so many delegations that had come to my native land to hear the debate in the North Atlantic Assembly and to enjoy Scotland's hospitality and scenery.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Secretary of State is surely aware that, from the Haldane principles of 1908 onwards, the Territorial Army has had a particular political structure because it has required political protection. Why has he therefore not taken any notice of the recommendation in paragraph 277 of the Defence Committee's report, which would at least have led to a Territorial Army of 50,000—a figure that the central staffs in the Ministry of Defence tried to slide past Sir Malcolm Rifkind when he was Defence Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) when he was Prime Minister? The tactic was rejected then because those politicians had a proper understanding of the role of the Territorial Army in the United Kingdom. Why has the Secretary of State failed in his duty to protect the country and the Territorial Army?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman, who was an adviser to the previous Government, has clearly changed his mind—or his view, with so many others, was ignored. The previous Government reduced the Territorial Army by 20,000 in the past 10 years. I shall therefore take no preaching or lessons from those who say that I should not accept military advice but who themselves went well beyond the figure that they now claim is the absolute bedrock.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): First, may I thank the Minister for the Armed Forces for the opportunity of consulting on the issue? The Secretary of State will be mindful of my comment that premier divisions will not be going for the top place in the division if they keep reserve forces at half strength. Some have kept their reserves at half strength because they do not have sufficient money—which I suspect is the reason for the current cuts in the armed forces. May I thank the Secretary of State for the fact that my own two units—in Sunnyside street and in Hydebank—have been retained? However, as the modern Army has to do a lot of policing, he will understand our regret that the Provost company in Kinnegar will be disbanded. Where will the sea cadet unit go when the centre in Newtonards is closed? Is it a matter of HMS Never Budge becoming HMS Scuttled?

Mr. Robertson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's words. Northern Ireland has done very well as part of the review—for good reason, too, as its recruitment record has made a serious contribution to the Regular Army.

On housing for the sea cadet unit, I have made a pledge about ensuring that alternative accommodation is available for cadet forces. The hon. Gentleman is, of course, more than at liberty to come to the Ministry to discuss how best that can be done.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is it not ironic that the decimation of the Territorial Army has been announced so soon after Armistice day? Was not the Secretary of State's language redolent of that of a first world war general trying to justify colossal losses? Will the Secretary of State be remembered for what he has done to our volunteer forces today as a cut-price Douglas Haig of the 1990s?

Mr. Robertson: That is pathetic, and it is unworthy of a statement in the House. In 1987, the strength of the Territorial Army was 78,000; in 1996, it was 57,000. A Conservative Government were in power all that time.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Although I recognise that many hon. Members are disappointed with the Minister's statement, it would be unreasonable for me not to welcome his announcement that the Dunoon TA centre is to remain open, and to thank the Minister for his personal letter, in which he mentioned Dunoon. I am sure that the Secretary of State—who knows the town well—appreciates that it would have been very wrong to lose the last Argyll TA link with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Mr. Robertson: The decision was all to do with operational reasons and absolutely nothing to do with the fact that I went to school in that area and was a member of the Army cadets attached to the Territorial Army centre there. Just as there are winners and losers, the decision was taken on the basis of what is required to ensure that there is a reasonable footprint across the United Kingdom and that the Territorial Army continues to make a huge contribution in rural and urban areas alike.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): In the forward to the document, the Secretary of State said—quite understandably, given the increase in peacekeeping by the armed forces—that there will be a shift in emphasis to logisticians, among other things. Against that background, will he explain to the House why the Royal Logistics Corps TA is being cut by a massive 30 per cent? That does not seem to be consistent with the objectives that he sets himself in the document's forward. Will he take this

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

opportunity also to make it quite clear that he does not in any way regard the TA as weekend warriors? Considering the huge numbers of TA soldiers who served in Bosnia, the Gulf and elsewhere, it would be very unfortunate if there were any scintilla of a suggestion that the House or the Secretary of State ever thought of the TA as weekend soldiers.

Mr. Robertson: I certainly do not have that view—indeed, I am trying to fight against it. However, I fear that repeated accusations may be one reason why we lose one third of the recruits to the Territorial Army in the first year. The whole thrust of the exercise that I am undertaking is to eliminate that image completely and to make sure that the Territorial Army is valued by and valuable to the country and to the regular forces. The hon. Gentleman is an honorary colonel of a Territorial Army unit and he has made several good suggestions which I have taken on board. I greatly value his advice. He asked a fair question about the cut in the Royal Logistics Corps. There have been reductions in numbers in some units because they support a larger deployment than is likely to occur. We have made operational decisions, and that happens to be one of them.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The Secretary of State made a joking reference to Norway in response to the question from the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith). Is he aware that the Norwegian army can field no fewer than 101,000 reserves to operational status within 72 hours and that Sweden has 450,000 army reserves, 48,000 of whom do up to 31 days' training a year? Is not the great weakness of his statement that it fatally fails to recognise the importance of numbers in reserves? It is surely a consequence of Treasury pressure. The Secretary of State spoke of footprints. The only footprints that I can discern are Treasury footprints—great big brown hob-nailed boots.

Mr. Robertson: Perhaps the Opposition could agree to one line on this issue. Those on the Front Bench say that I have been sold some sort of pass by the General Staff, and now the hon. Gentleman suggests that it is all due to the Treasury. The fact is that the Army needs the Territorial Army, which has to be revamped and modernised to make it useful.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Norway and Sweden. I repeat what I said in response to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier): we are not comparing like with like. Countries such as ours that are able to contribute through their regular forces on deployment have different requirements of their reserves than countries that are unable to make the same overseas deployment. That is well worth bearing in mind.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Along with many Members on both sides of the House, I am most concerned about the future of the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. I was relieved to hear what the Secretary of State said. Will he give an assurance that their role will be further enhanced so that, when necessary, they will be able to assist in emergencies such as the flooding incident at Llandudno and undertake other civil work, as they have in the past?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman repeats the point that we have kept the cap badge. That is important not just for the operational importance of the unit, but for morale in the unit and in Wales. The relevance of the armed forces and their role will be in accordance with the needs of the Army.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Although there will be great sadness at the fact that the Somerset Light Infantry is to be extinguished after more than 300 years, there will also be relief at the fact that a Territorial Army presence will be maintained in the county. Can the Secretary of State reassure me that the very small infantry units—the 15 complements proposed for Somerset and Cornwall—will remain viable in the long term?

Mr. Robertson: The purpose of the exercise is to make sure that we have viable units for the future.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): The Secretary of State said in his statement that we need a modern Territorial Army more fully integrated into our armed forces. The 4th Battalion of the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment TA works effectively with the 1st Battalion of the regulars. Perhaps the Secretary of State can explain why it will be more fully integrated if it is abolished and replaced by two companies of the South-West Battalion which will have no attachment to the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment.

Mr. Robertson: It is for the simple reason that the soldiers concerned will be at a higher level of readiness than they are trained for at present. They will be able to train on equipment to which they did not have access before; therefore, they will be more usable within the Territorial Army than the present configuration allows.

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I wish to speak up for an unfashionable arm of the service. The Secretary of State will know from his visits to British soldiers on active service overseas and elsewhere that none are more heavily committed than the Royal Engineers, yet the engineering reserves are being cut from nine regiments to five, which seems hard to justify. My plea is SOS—save our sappers.

Mr. Robertson: The fact is that the five regiments that we will retain will be much better able to serve at higher levels of readiness in places such as Bosnia, where our reserve forces make such a big contribution. At present, we believe that the number of Royal Engineers units is designed to support a larger force than is likely to be deployed, even on NATO operations. That is why it is the operational judgment of the Army and Ministers that they should be reduced. However, I believe that the five remaining units will be much more useful and better motivated as a result of the change.

Mr. Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Like him, I spent my teenage years in the Army cadet force. They may not have helped me, but they were particularly enjoyable years.

I believe that the cadet forces are very productive in channelling the positive energies of young people, and I benefited greatly from my experience. I particularly welcome the £3 million extra that is to be put into the cadet force in the next four years. Will the Air Training Corps benefit from that money or is it exclusively for the Army cadet force?

I also spent a short time in the Territorial Army, and I am delighted that 89 Signal Squadron in Rugby is to remain. I was there just two weeks ago. Its members fit the bill very well. They are highly trained, highly competent and extremely capable individuals fulfilling a useful role in complementing our regular soldiers.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his praise. He is right to mention the contribution made by the cadets. As 25 per cent. of the armed forces have experience in the cadets, perhaps we should try to discover how many right hon. and hon. Members have the same experience. Such was the variety available in Dunoon grammar school at the time I attended it that I was able to serve in the Air Training Corps as well. I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that it will also benefit from the extra resources that will be made available to the cadets, who are a very fine movement.

Recently, I went to see the cadets in Hamilton, and I was enormously impressed by what they do and by their spirit. I was also able to make a personal visit to a large detachment in Cheltenham at a school attended by a young cousin of mine. Again, the high morale of those involved was a joy to see.

Stakeholder Pension

4.58 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require persons to contribute to a personal retirement pension scheme administered by an approved welfare supplier; to make provision with respect to contributions into and payments out of such schemes; to establish arrangements for the strategic direction and monitoring of pensions; and for connected purposes.

Our country is scarred by two nations in retirement. There are, thank goodness, a growing proportion of pensioners who have an adequate—sometimes more than adequate—income to see them through their retirement. At the same time, millions of pensioners are poor—some of them very poor. The Government have already introduced a number of measures to target resources on that group. Labour Members are looking forward to additional measures before the next election to help the poorest pensioners.

The Bill would lay the foundations to ensure that all pensioners shared in the growing long-term prosperity of our country by implementing a universal compulsory pension. All those in work would be required to become members of a stakeholder pension scheme on their 20th birthday. As each year went by, successive generations of 20-year-olds would come into the scheme. This is not a short-term measure. Pensions reform, above all else, is a long-term business and concern of the country and the House.

The aim of the Bill is to offer a guarantee. In today's terms, it would offer twice what a pensioner gets from the national insurance retirement pension—a guarantee of 30 per cent. of average earnings for a single pensioner when they came to retire. The link with average earnings is the crucial aspect in guaranteeing that future generations share in the growing long-term prosperity of the country.

That guarantee of 30 per cent. of average earnings for a single pensioner would be made up of two parts: today's national insurance retirement pension and a funded pension scheme—the stakeholder pension. The funded stakeholder part would be sold by approved welfare suppliers. Many groups and individuals could become approved welfare suppliers. They could be sponsored by trade unions, by employers, by associations of employers or by the companies that already provide pensions, such as the Legal and General and the Prudential. The crucial aspect of an approved welfare supplier is that the scheme must be owned by the members. The sponsor must set up the approved welfare supplier at arm's length from the parent organisation.

Above all, the Bill would allow for graduated contributions for the flat-rate guarantee. The scheme would have the finance to bring in the poor and those who were not part of the labour market at any given time. The groups for which the House will have most sympathy, I believe, are the parents—usually mothers, but sometimes fathers—who are outside the labour market looking after children under five and those who are doing the crucial job of looking after the long-term sick and disabled. Through that form of financing, the scheme could become universal, although it would also be compulsory.

I should like to sketch out to the House the difference that the Bill would make to our country. A Bill on compulsory stakeholder pensions would offer the Government the

[Mr. Frank Field]

single most important social security change available for the extension of social cohesion, something that is one of the major aims of Government policy. It would also open up a series of other welfare reforms. We are long past the time when any hon. Member thinks that there is a single, big bang reform that would implement the necessary changes. It would be possible to use a compulsory universal scheme as a basis for long-term care insurance, if the House and the Government wanted to move in that direction. Because risks would be pooled, there would also be the possibility of cheap life insurance, offering reformers the chance to move safely from current national insurance provision, such as widows' and what will shortly be widowers' benefits, to a form of cover associated with stakeholder pensions.

If we want better pensions, we need to put more money aside for them. We cannot have better pensions by paying less. Such a reform is a vital accompaniment to the pension guarantee that the Government have already offered—a means-tested income support guarantee that properly offers extra help to the poorest pensioners. Unless that is accompanied by a compulsory savings scheme, the guarantee will send out a clear message to many that they do not need to become members of pension schemes and do not need to bother to save, because, when they come to retire, taxpayers will bail them out.

Let me conclude by declaring how the Bill would change the welfare state fundamentally. It would offer the prospect of ending poverty, which is otherwise the outlook for millions of today's workers. It would offer a guaranteed income on which everybody could build by becoming a member of another pension scheme or having savings. People would know that those schemes would be paid in addition to the stakeholder pension, not withdrawn because of it. Through the delivery of approved welfare suppliers, it would offer a growth in civil society—those organisations that are greater than individuals or families, but less than Governments, states or nations. Above all, it would signal that, in this country, welfare reform is about more welfare, not less, but that more of that welfare will be provided outside the state, through mutual associations and companies, or organisations controlled by their members.

5.7 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): It was a privilege to serve with the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on the Social Security Select Committee. He knows how much I admire his work. We had many conversations, and were party to many more, on pension reform, notably during our Committee's visit to Chile to study one of the world's most revolutionary pension reforms—imposed, interestingly enough, by a dictator. We can safely say that Frank ain't no Pinochet.

The right hon. Gentleman has risen to greater things in government. I still serve on the Committee, which continues to grapple with the intractable problems of pension reform. The right hon. Gentleman is in the happy position of being an ex-Minister, something that can provide opportunities for even more creative thinking, untrammelled by the dreary tramlines of office, laid down by the Treasury, which dictate that, whichever way one may want to turn, the points always ensure that one ends up in the station marked "means testing".

The right hon. Gentleman is a revolutionary. Like so many revolutionaries of the intellectual rather than the bruising type, he has, sadly, been devoured by his own revolution. Perhaps it is in the nature of great moralists and idealists that they can pen an idea or a concept, but cannot steer it through the muddied byways of government to fruition.

What is the great idea of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead? It is that the state can impose moral behaviour, Victorian virtues and self-reliance on all or most of us. Not surprisingly, I, too, am attracted by this antidote to libertarianism. Sadly, government is a pursuit of dreams frustrated by practicalities, particularly politics. As the Chancellor no doubt made clear to the right hon. Gentleman, the Bill simply will not deliver Labour, or anyone else who proposes it, any popularity.

Why should I care if the right hon. Member for Birkenhead or Labour does what is right at the expense of popularity? After all, we Conservatives did it often enough—eventually with fatal results. I care because any reform must be sustainable through a 40-year gestation period. The proposal is undeliverable in this sad world of spin doctors, opinion polls and elections because, with the decline in yields from gilts and the rise in annuity costs—I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), who knows about such things and works in the City, for his help with this part of my speech—a contribution rate of 12 per cent. of everybody's salary would be required to create an effective retirement pension of the type proposed. That means a massive rise in taxation.

We would still be left with the desperate problems of those who, through disability, unemployment, bad luck or lack of effort were incapable of sustaining such contributions. As the Minister of State, Department of Social Security said off the record, "Why should people on low incomes have help in funding their pensions when their incomes might be much higher later?" Not surprisingly, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead crashed into the No. 10 buffers with his ideas. The great game of No. 10 is not the creation of a new Jerusalem but the return, at the next election, of new Labour. A massive hike in taxation is not part of that scenario to No. 10.

All that is rather sad, because compulsion to save is probably the best way forward, but, I do not believe that it is politically deliverable. Although we respect the work that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead has done, he is being disingenuous if he claims that, having battled through the arguments during 14 months in government and having had finally to resign, his ideas are acceptable to the Government. I do not believe that they are.

We cannot, of course, go on as we are. We know—or, it is hinted at—that, as a way forward, a shoddy compromise is being imposed by the Treasury enforcer who is ensconced in Richmond house, the Minister for the Cabinet Office. That shoddy compromise has been carefully crafted to leave out in the cold the non-voting poor and to leave to their own devices the influential better-off. Meanwhile, the state pension will go on declining, eventually into a miserly 17 per cent. of average earnings by 2020. Means-testing, to the disgust of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead and, indeed, all of us, will increase. The poor, and even the not-so-poor on lower incomes, will have no incentive to save because any hard-won private pension contributions will simply deprive them of income support.

Perhaps we are trying to reinvent the wheel. Perhaps we should create a political consensus—if that is possible—to restore the earnings link to the state pension, funded through higher national insurance contributions, to provide a decent living for elderly people, and not make them rely increasingly on income support. Perhaps, indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), the former Social Security Secretary and present deputy leader of the Conservative party, was right: we must devise a long-term plan to privatise all pensions, building on the world-leading role of our private pensions industry.

I fear that such a radical solution must await the next Conservative Government; we shall not get it from this Government. Meanwhile, we should vote to flush out from those on the Government Benches and their supporters just how many hon. Members are prepared to follow the prophet down the path of pension righteousness and into the path of political peril.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 37, Noes 1.

Division No. 378] **[5.14 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hinchliffe, David
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkwood, Archy
McDonnell, John
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Wicks, Malcolm
Willis, Phil
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Plaskitt and
Mr. Paul Stinchcombe.

NOES

Leigh, Edward

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Fabricant and
Mr. Howard Flight.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Frank Field, Sir Peter Tapsell, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Jackie Ballard, Mr. Steve Webb, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Derek Foster, Mr. Malcolm Wicks, Mr. Clifford Forsythe and Mr. David Davis.

Stakeholder Pension

Mr. Frank Field accordingly presented a Bill to require persons to contribute to a personal retirement pension scheme administered by an approved welfare supplier; to make provision with respect to contributions into and payments out of such schemes; to establish arrangements for the strategic direction and monitoring of pensions; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 261].

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

5.26 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It will not have escaped your notice that the final item of business for today before the Adjournment debate is:

"Consideration of any Lords Messages and Amendments that may be received".

In view of the fact that another place has just reaffirmed its earlier decision, have you had a request from the Leader of the House to make a brief business statement? If not, would you allow the right hon. Lady to make one?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I have no information about any statement, but perhaps the Leader of the House would like to respond to that point of order.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I was not intending to make a statement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it may be helpful to the House if, further to that point of order, I inform the House that it has already been agreed through the usual channels that the European Parliamentary Elections Bill will be taken as first business tomorrow. I also note the Opposition's warm welcome for a process whereby hereditary peers interfere with elections.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Messages from the Lords shall have been received.—[*Mrs. Anne McGuire.*]

Scrutiny of European Business

5.27 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Seventh Report from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on the Scrutiny of European Business (HC 791) and takes note of the White Paper on the Scrutiny of European Business (Cm. 4095).

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I understand that, with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Resolution of the House of 24th October 1990 relating to European Community Legislation be rescinded and the following Resolution be made:

That,

(1) No Minister of the Crown should give agreement in the Council or in the European Council to any proposal for European Community legislation or for a common position or joint action under Title V or a joint position, joint action or convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union—

(a) which is still subject to scrutiny (that is, on which the European Scrutiny Committee has not completed its scrutiny) or

(b) which is awaiting consideration by the House (that is, which has been recommended by the European Scrutiny Committee for consideration pursuant to Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) but in respect of which the House has not come to a Resolution).

(2) In this Resolution, any reference to agreement to a proposal includes—

(a) agreement to a programme, plan or recommendation for European Community legislation;

(b) political agreement;

(c) in the case of a proposal on which the Council acts in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189b of the Treaty of Rome (co-decision), agreement to a common position, to a joint text, and to confirmation of the common position (with or without amendments proposed by the European Parliament); and

(d) in the case of a proposal on which the Council acts in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189c of the Treaty of Rome (co-operation), agreement to a common position.

(3) The Minister concerned may, however, give agreement—

(a) to a proposal which is still subject to scrutiny if he considers that it is confidential, routine or trivial or is substantially the same as a proposal on which scrutiny has been completed;

(b) to a proposal which is awaiting consideration by the House if the European Scrutiny Committee has indicated that agreement need not be withheld pending consideration.

(4) The Minister concerned may also give agreement to a proposal which is still subject to scrutiny or awaiting consideration by the House if he decides that for special reasons agreement should be given; but he should explain his reasons—

(a) in every such case, to the European Scrutiny Committee at the first opportunity after reaching his decision; and

(b) in the case of a proposal awaiting consideration by the House, to the House at the first opportunity after giving agreement.

(5) In relation to any proposal which requires adoption by unanimity, abstention shall, for the purposes of paragraph (4), be treated as giving agreement.

That, upon the entering into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Resolution on Scrutiny of European Business (No. 2) shall have effect with the following modifications:

In paragraph (1) the words "a common position or joint action under Title V or a joint position, joint action or convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union" are replaced by the words "a common strategy, joint action or common position under Title V or a common position, framework decision, decision or convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union"; and

in paragraph (2)(c) the words "a common position, to a joint text, and to confirmation of the common position (with or without amendments proposed by the European Parliament)" are replaced by the words "a common position, to an act in the form of a common position incorporating amendments proposed by the European Parliament, and to a joint text".

That, with effect from the beginning of the next Session, Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be replaced by the following Standing Order (European Standing Committees):

".—(1) There shall be three standing committees, called European Standing Committees, to which shall stand referred for consideration on motion, unless the House otherwise orders, such European Union documents as defined in Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee) as may be recommended by the European Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

(2) If a motion that specified European Union documents as aforesaid shall not stand referred to a European Standing Committee is made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business, the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(3) Each European Standing Committee shall consist of thirteen Members nominated for the duration of a Parliament by the Committee of Selection; and in nominating such Members, the Committee of Selection shall—

(a) have regard to the qualifications of the Members nominated and to the composition of the House; and

(b) have power to discharge Members from time to time, and to appoint others in substitution.

(4) The quorum of a European Standing Committee shall be three, excluding the chairman.

(5) Any Member, though not nominated to a European Standing Committee, may take part in the committee's proceedings and may move amendments to any motion made as provided in paragraphs (7) and (8) below, but such Member shall not make any motion, vote or be counted in the quorum; provided that a Minister of the Crown who is a Member of this House but not nominated to the committee may make a motion as provided in paragraphs (7) and (8) below; and the Government may appoint the precedence of notices of motion to be considered in each committee.

(6) The European Standing Committees, and the principal subject matter of the European Union documents to be referred to each, shall be as set out below; and in making recommendations for further consideration, the European Scrutiny Committee shall specify the committee to which in its opinion the documents ought to be referred; and subject to paragraph (2) of this order, the documents shall be referred to that committee accordingly

European Standing Committees	*Principal subject matter*
	Matters within the responsibility of the following Departments:
A	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Environment, Transport and the Regions; Forestry Commission; (and analogous responsibilities of Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices)
B	HM Treasury (including HM Customs and Excise); Social Security; Foreign and Commonwealth Office; International Development; Home Office; Lord Chancellor's Department; together with any matters not otherwise allocated by this Order
C	Trade and Industry; Employment and Education; Culture, Media and Sport; Health

(7) The chairman may permit Ministers of the Crown to make statements and to answer questions thereon put by Members, in respect of each motion relative to a European Union document or documents referred to a European Standing Committee of which a Minister shall have given notice; but no question shall be taken after the expiry of a period of one hour from the commencement of the first such statement:

Provided that the chairman may, if he sees fit, allow questions to be taken for a further period of not more than half an hour after the expiry of that period.

(8) Following the conclusion of the proceedings under the previous paragraph, the motion referred to therein may be made, to which amendments may be moved; and, if proceedings thereon have not been previously concluded, the chairman shall interrupt the consideration of such motion and amendments when the committee shall have sat for a period of two and a half hours, and shall then put forthwith successively:

(a) the question on any amendment already proposed from the chair; and

(b) the main question (or the main question, as amended).

The chairman shall thereupon report to the House any resolution to which the committee has come, or that it has come to no resolution, without any further question being put.

(9) If any motion is made in the House in relation to any European Union document in respect of which a report has been made to the House in accordance with paragraph (8) of this order, the Speaker shall forthwith put successively—

(a) the question on any amendment selected by her which may be moved;

(b) the main question (or the main question, as amended);

and proceedings in pursuance of this paragraph, though opposed, may be decided after the expiration of the time for opposed business.

(10) With the modifications provided in this order, the following Standing Orders shall apply to European Standing Committees:

No. 85 (Chairmen of standing committees);

No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees); and

No. 89 (Procedure in standing committees)."

That Standing Order No. 143 (Select Committee on European Legislation) be replaced by the following Standing Order (European Scrutiny Committee):

(1) There shall be a select committee, to be called the European Scrutiny Committee, to examine European Union documents and—

(a) to report its opinion on the legal and political importance of each such document and, where it considers appropriate, to report also on the reasons for its opinion and on any matters of principle, policy or law which may be affected;

(b) to make recommendations for the further consideration of any such document pursuant to Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees); and

(c) to consider any issue arising upon any such document or group of documents, or related matters.

The expression 'European Union document' in this order and in Standing Orders No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), No. 89 (Procedure in standing committees) and No. 119 (European Standing Committees) means—

(i) any proposal under the Community Treaties for legislation by the Council or the Council acting jointly with the European Parliament;

(ii) any document which is published for submission to the European Council, the Council or the European Central Bank;

(iii) any proposal to define a common position or for joint action under Title V of the Treaty on European Union which is prepared for submission to the Council;

(iv) any proposal for a joint position, joint action or a convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union which is prepared for submission to the Council;

(v) any document (not falling within (ii), (iii) or (iv) above) which is published by one Union institution for or with a view to submission to another Union institution and which does not relate exclusively to consideration of any proposal for legislation;

(vi) any other document relating to European Union matters deposited in the House by a Minister of the Crown.

(2) The committee shall consist of sixteen Members.

(3) The committee and any sub-committee appointed by it shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker.

(4) The committee shall have power to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(5) The committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time.

(6) The quorum of the committee shall be five.

(7) The committee shall have power to appoint sub-committees and to refer to such sub-committees any of the matters referred to the committee.

(8) Every such sub-committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(9) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before such sub-committees.

(10) The quorum of every such sub-committee shall be two.

(11) The committee shall have power to seek from any committee specified in paragraph (14) of this order its opinion on any European Union document, and to require a reply to such a request within such time as it may specify.

(12) The committee or any sub-committee appointed by it shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee specified in paragraph (14) of this order or with any committee of the Lords on the European Communities, or any sub-committee of that committee, for the purposes of deliberating or examining witnesses.

(13) The committee shall have power to communicate to any committee specified in paragraph (14) of this order its evidence or any other document relating to matters of common interest.

(14) The committees specified for the purposes of this order are those appointed under Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) including any sub-committees of such committees, the Select Committee on Public Administration, the Committee of Public Accounts, and the Environmental Audit Committee.

(15) Unless the House otherwise orders, each member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a Member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

That the following consequential Amendments to Standing Orders be made:

In Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents), line 3, leave out "Community documents" and insert "Union documents (as defined in Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee))".

In Standing Order No. 89 (Procedure in Standing Committees), line 18, leave out "Community" and insert "Union".

In Standing Order No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration), line 20, at the end insert:

"(c) to communicate to the European Scrutiny Committee its evidence and any other document relating to matters of common interest; and

(d) to meet concurrently with the European Scrutiny Committee, or any sub-committee thereof, for the purposes of deliberating or taking evidence.";

In Standing Order No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts),

line 17, after "departments)" insert "and to the European Scrutiny Committee",

line 21, at end add:

"(4) The committee shall have power to meet concurrently with the European Scrutiny Committee, or any sub-committee thereof, for the purposes of deliberating or taking evidence."

In Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments)

line 31, after "and" insert "to the European Scrutiny Committee,"

line 39, at end insert "or with the European Scrutiny Committee or any sub-committee thereof for the purposes of deliberating or taking evidence;"

line 46, after "thereof" insert ", or with the European Scrutiny Committee or any sub-committee thereof,"

In Standing Order No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee), in line 30, after "thereof" insert ", or with the European Scrutiny Committee or any sub-committee thereof,".

That, with effect from the coming into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam, Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee) shall have effect with the following Amendments:

line 21, leave out "to define a common position or for joint action" and insert "for a common strategy, a joint action or a common position";

line 23, after "Council" insert "or to the European Council"; and

line 24, leave out "joint position, joint action" and insert "common position, framework decision, decision".

That Mr. Ben Bradshaw, Mr. Colin Breed, Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. Roger Casale, Mr. William Cash, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. Jim Dobbin, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mrs. Linda Gilroy, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Ms Jennifer Jones, Mrs. Rosemary McKenna, Mr. Jim Marshall, Mr. Bill Rammell, Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Shaun Woodward be members of the European Scrutiny Committee.

Mrs. Beckett: Our place in Europe is of vital importance and relevance to all of us. Equally, decisions taken in Brussels have an impact on all of us. That is why proper parliamentary oversight of the range of issues negotiated in Brussels and elsewhere is essential to protect our interests and, equally important, to bring Europe closer to the people. However, if we are to achieve those objectives, Parliament needs to be promptly and fully informed both of proposed European Union legislation and policies and of the Government's approach to negotiations.

That is why the Government undertook, in their election manifesto, to overhaul the parliamentary process for scrutinising European legislation. Our aims were to strengthen the role of Parliament in relation to European Union business; to improve democratic oversight of new legislation under negotiation in the EU; and to increase transparency and parliamentary awareness of how European Union business is conducted. We have explored a number of options for change and, last week, published a White Paper setting out proposals for improving the scrutiny arrangements that govern how Parliament deals with European Union business.

Arrangements for the scrutiny of European business by Parliament have been in place since 1973. Under them, the Government make available to Parliament proposals for European legislation coming before the Council of Ministers, as well as other documents that may have important policy, legislative or financial implications. An accompanying explanatory memorandum describes the purpose of the document, and the Government's views on it.

In this House, the Select Committee on European Legislation—the Scrutiny Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood)—considers each document, and may recommend that documents of particular importance are debated in Standing Committee, or by the whole House. The cornerstone of the scrutiny process is the parliamentary scrutiny reserve—an undertaking by the Government not to agree to a measure in the Council of Ministers until Parliament has completed its consideration of the proposal, unless there are special reasons for doing so. Similar arrangements operate in the other place.

The present scrutiny arrangements—which covered European Community business originally—are generally regarded as having worked well and, consequently, the Government propose today to build on that process and to make use of the experience of the arrangements that we have acquired. Although the arrangements for scrutiny have been updated periodically, they have not kept pace with developments in the EU. For example, the arrangements do not currently provide Parliament with the opportunity to comment on the full range of EU business. The common foreign and security policy, and justice and home affairs are not covered by existing procedures.

The Scrutiny Committee reported comprehensively on the scrutiny arrangements in July 1996, and made a wide range of recommendations. The Select Committee on Procedure endorsed those findings in March 1997. The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons also considered the scrutiny arrangements as part of its wider remit to consider how the practices and procedures of the House should be modernised. In January this year, the Government submitted a memorandum to the Committee, outlining the key elements of a modern scrutiny system. The Modernisation Committee made its recommendations to improve scrutiny in June this year. The Government's White Paper sets out our proposals for meeting the recommendations.

Under the new arrangements, the Government would inform Parliament about proposals for European legislation and other important documents covering all three areas of EU activity. As before, the Scrutiny Committee would be able to examine the documents in detail on the basis of an explanatory memorandum, which would be supplemented by any further information that the Scrutiny Committee requested. The House would be able to debate any document it considered particularly important—normally in one of the European Standing Committees, although there would be flexibility for documents to be debated on the Floor of the House.

The new arrangements would allow more scope for specialist Select Committees of the House to be more closely involved in the scrutiny process—for example, where the measures under scrutiny fall within their area of expertise. The Scrutiny Committee would also be able to seek the views of departmental Select Committees on individual measures.

The scrutiny reserve would now cover not only European Community legislation but pre-legislative documents, and would be extended to cover business under the common foreign and security policy, and in the field of justice and home affairs. Obviously, the Government would continue to be able, in exceptional circumstances, to agree a measure before parliamentary scrutiny was completed.

Under the new arrangements, the Government would inform the Scrutiny Committee before a formal Council of Ministers of business expected to be on the agenda, and would provide additional evidence requested on particular items. Following the Council, the Government would provide Parliament with a written report on the outcome of the meeting. The Government will continue to make time available on the Floor of the House of Commons to debate European business before each European Council.

I turn now to the practical changes—the amendments needed to the Standing Orders and to the scrutiny reserve resolution to effect the new arrangements. The changes that we are proposing to both the scrutiny resolution and the Standing Orders follow in all but one respect the recommendations of the Modernisation Committee. The Committee recommended that the number of European Standing Committees be increased from two to five. The Committee recognised that there were practical problems involved in that, and suggested that the number of members of each Committee should be reduced from 13. After discussions through the usual channels, the best solution seems to be to keep the membership at 13, but to have only three Committees.

The proposed Standing Order change shows how the subject areas of EU documents would be divided between the three Committees. The new scrutiny resolution is set out in full, as are the two main Standing Orders affected by the implementation of the report. The new Standing Order No. 119, on European Standing Committees, will come into effect at the start of the next Session. Members will then be nominated to the three Standing Committees. The new Standing Order No. 143, on the European Scrutiny Committee, will take immediate effect.

There is also a motion on the Order Paper to appoint the current members of the Select Committee on European Legislation to the new Scrutiny Committee. There are a number of consequential amendments to other Standing Orders, mainly providing for communication between the European Scrutiny Committee and other Select Committees. The wording of the scrutiny resolution and of the Standing Orders will need to be altered slightly when the treaty of Amsterdam comes into force next year. As the changes are textual rather than substantial, the motions before the House tonight provide for those changes to be made at the appropriate time.

Before concluding, I wish to mention the effect of devolution on the arrangements. We presume that, in due course, the devolved bodies will wish to scrutinise EU business. We will be putting in place arrangements to facilitate that and to receive their comments.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): My right hon. Friend—who has been sympathetic to this view—will be aware that we desperately need a change of culture in the House if we are to have proper scrutiny of the European Parliament. Many hon. Members are quite terrified of Europe, have never been there and have never even used their one free trip per year. I see from the report that the Select Committee has suggested that the one trip a year paid for by the House is not enough. Could we have more access in the next Session so that we can have that culture change, and so that people are not terrified and can learn about how European institutions work?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend—with a number of others—takes seriously the issue of how the House can better scrutinise European Union business, and strongly argues that a freer interchange between the House and the European institutions will facilitate that process. He will know that we are bound by the travel budget, but we are considering whether there is room for greater flexibility to facilitate the kind of exchange that he and others have in mind.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the speed with which the relevant documents can be provided to the Committees is important in making them more effective. There is no point in having an elaborate Committee system if documents arrive five or 10 hours before they are to be debated. Frankly, there are some of us who not only know where Brussels is, but worked there when we were not politicians, and have been known to speak one or two odd foreign languages—no odder than our English, I have to say. Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that we want to see what is being debated in time for the House to be fully informed? Otherwise, a lot of the proposals will not be useful.

Mrs. Beckett: I take my hon. Friend's point, and she is quite correct. The Government are mindful of the difficulties and problems caused to the House—and, indeed, to the Government—by the late arrival of documents. I am also well aware that my hon. Friend is in a happy position; what is very often the reason for such a delay—the difficulty in obtaining translations—is less likely to worry her, as, if I recall correctly, she speaks about seven languages, and is fluent, discursive and, frequently, more than effective as a parliamentarian in all of them.

The Government are mindful of the problems that will be caused to the scrutiny process if documents are not readily available, and we are doing all we can. My hon. Friend will know that the European Scrutiny Committee was instrumental in making proposals, which have been taken up across Europe, on the timing and handling of documents. We hope that technological developments will make the transmission of information easier. She is entirely right to say that that is the key to the working of the arrangements.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I was paying attention to what the right hon. Lady said about the possibility that the devolved Parliaments might want to scrutinise various matters. Scrutiny of fisheries legislation, which is contentious and would rank highly enough to be discussed in both Parliaments, might result in two different Parliaments reaching different conclusions. My request is merely for information. Does the right hon. Lady have any idea how we would overcome the problem of the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament coming to entirely different conclusions on the same matter? How would we proceed?

Mrs. Beckett: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern. We must explore the procedures and how they can interact between a fresh Assembly, or Parliament in Scotland, and this place. The hon. Gentleman knows where the responsibility for those matters lies.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): There are already arguments that a Minister from a devolved Scottish Parliament could be a lead Minister in negotiations and discussions. Does the right hon. Lady envisage the right of a Scottish Parliament not to implement a directive that this House considers fit to be implemented? That is the critical factor. How does the right hon. Lady envisage negotiations taking place to bring the Parliaments to a conclusion on those matters?

Mrs. Beckett: I have some respect for the hon. Lady. Perhaps I misunderstood her question. No doubt we shall explore that issue at length in future. I almost get the impression—I say this with respect—that she is thinking that the Scottish National party might want not only to sever the Union with England, but to leave the European Union. That seems to me to be the purport of her saying that the Scottish Parliament might refuse to implement directives.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The right hon. Lady will be aware that a great deal of the initial work on Community business is undertaken by officials from the United Kingdom and other member states' Governments attending management committees and similar structures as they develop ideas at a formative stage. Will she consider publishing lists of the committees that are sitting and stating the type of work that they are doing? One of Parliament's problems is acquiring knowledge of business early enough for us to be able to influence it by debate in the House.

Mrs. Beckett: I entirely understand the right hon. Gentleman's point. I am not sure that publishing lists of committees that are meeting is the right way in which to proceed, because that may result in a burdensome amount of information without being very illuminating.

The Government and the European Scrutiny Committee, as it will be, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale, have drawn attention to the great importance of pre-legislative scrutiny and involvement at an early stage. Although that is an issue for the House, rather than the Government, and must be carefully considered on grounds of cost, I suspect that it was at the back of the minds of those who suggested a national Parliament office in Brussels. We shall all, over time, give more and more consideration to how it is possible for the House to be informed and to be able to have an input in the early days, when it is possible to have the greatest influence on the formation of proposals.

The Government believe that the new arrangements for the scrutiny of European Union matters which are before the House will allow Parliament to carry out a comprehensive, thorough and effective examination of the full range of business across all three pillars. The adoption of the new arrangements and the changes to Standing Orders will contribute to making the EU policy process and EU legislation more democratic, more transparent and better understood. That can only be a benefit to the House and the country.

5.44 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The Opposition support the general drift of the remarks of the Leader of the House. We were happy to agree to the unanimous report of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, and we accept

the reasons that the right hon. Lady gave for amending one of those recommendations and saying that there should be three Committees rather than five. We are glad that those Committees will each have 13 members.

The whole House owes a debt to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) and those who serve on his Committee. That work is largely unsung, but not unhonoured because the Select Committee performs an extremely important task. Many hon. Members are barely aware of the Committee's existence, but those of us who are aware are exceptionally grateful to him and his colleagues for their hard work.

If one wants an indication of the hard work that is necessary, one has only to go to the Vote Office, as I did earlier during the Division, where I picked up a list of European Community documents for the week ending Saturday 14 November. As most hon. Members will know, a similar list is produced every week. The current list names 49 documents, ranging over issues as diverse and important as food law, landfill waste, air transport competition rules, sound financial management and renewable sources of energy. I shall not read the whole list. That reveals the sheer weight of paper that is coming in week by week, day by day.

It is crucial that Members of the House have the chance to have those documents examined on our behalf. I say "on our behalf" because we largely depend on those hon. Members who are appointed to the Select Committee and the European Standing Committees, and those who will serve on the three Committees that we shall, I hope, have after today's debate. It is vital that the Government honour their pledge and responsibility to make sure that important matters are not agreed to in Europe until the House has had an opportunity, via its Committees, to scrutinise the documents and, if necessary, to debate and vet them in detail.

We have to improve our relations with European institutions by scrutinising with greater care—that is no criticism of those who currently scrutinise these matters—the documents that emanate from the European Union. I do not say "from Europe" because, of course, we are in Europe. I was interested to hear that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) does not live in Europe, but most of us think that we do.

Mr. Sheerman: Whether we disagree about being pro-Europe or anti-Europe—I am a passionate pro-European—the hon. Gentleman knows that I was referring to recommendation 39 in the report. It is strange that Britain has been a member of the European Union for a long time, but that hon. Members have one trip a year to a mainland European institution. I want the hon. Gentleman to join me in the campaign to make sure that we educate hon. Members so that they can go to Brussels and Strasbourg, and find their way around and have knowledge and perception of the culture. He will know, as do those of us who regularly go to those institutions, that we must do our homework, and if we do not travel to Europe to do so, we shall be unable to fulfil our function as Members of Parliament. Too many hon. Members do not even use their one trip a year. I get passionate about the matter because I want to educate my colleagues on both sides of the House.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I agree that it would be desirable if more of our colleagues had the opportunity to use that facility more often. We are in favour of greater flexibility in the use of the sums that are available. Of course, hon. Members are subject to no prohibition on visiting European institutions whenever they wish. I know that the hon. Gentleman is making a point about the trip that is paid for, and yes, we agree that it would be desirable that there should be greater flexibility, so that, for instance, those who adamantly do not wish to avail themselves of the facility may pass it on to others, and so that others who really want to make the trip may do so more often. I believe that all hon. Members should be able to use the facility, and I am personally in favour of extending it.

I understand why the Leader of the House is not with us any more—she courteously explained why she could not be here now—but I hope that, when the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office winds up the debate, he will spell out more clearly the Government's attitude and say whether the Government are prepared to seek further means to enable hon. Members to visit European institutions more often.

I should also be grateful if the Parliamentary Secretary would say something about the national Parliament office. The Leader of the House mentioned it in passing, but she did not spell out the Government's response to the clear recommendation by the Modernisation Committee that there should be a national Parliament office, representing Westminster in Brussels. I should like to know precisely what the Government intend to do about that and what they envisage would be the participation in that national Parliament office of the devolved Parliament in Scotland and the devolved Assembly in Wales.

On that subject, it is my understanding—I hope that, if I am wrong, the Parliamentary Secretary will correct me—that the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly would have a specific role to play where responsibility was devolved, but that, where responsibility had not been devolved, it remained firmly and clearly with the House, so that Committees of the House would examine such subjects. I should be grateful for clarification.

To my mind, we need as much liaison and contact as possible if European institutions are to work and if enmity is not to be built up between the House and European institutions. Frequently, enmity is based on ignorance. The more people know and understand, the more they are able intelligently to debate.

Absurdities come from Brussels from time to time, and it is right that they should be denounced. It is important to ensure that the new Committees do not have sole and exclusive responsibility for debating European documents, and it is incumbent on Government to try to find more time in which those key issues may be debated on the Floor of the House. I know that hon. Members who are not voting members of Committees may attend the European Scrutiny Committees, but that is not quite the same as holding a debate in the Chamber.

I hope that, when the Leader of the House and her colleagues consider the next parliamentary Session, they will pay regard to the time that is allowed for European debates in the Chamber. It is important that such matters be debated. Moreover, given the changes that will occur within the European Union in the next few months, there will be greater and greater focus on those European

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

institutions, and greater interest in debating what goes on there and what emanates from them. Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary will say something about that.

Although the matter is not strictly relevant to the subject that we are discussing at the moment, I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will bear in mind the fact that there is an institution called the European Parliament, with which it is important that we seek to build better relations. Some years ago, I was one of those who voted against the Bill, supported by the present Baroness Thatcher, that provided for the holding of direct elections to the European Parliament. I did so because I wanted there to be a longer period in which delegated members went to that Parliament from this place; I wanted to maintain the connection between the Parliaments. I believe that that was a reasonable reason for rebelling against the Bill.

There is less contact between the European Parliament and this place than I would wish. I must not stray too far in that direction because it is not strictly relevant to the Modernisation Committee's report. I merely add that the report reveals the constructive attitude that what comes from Europe is relevant to what we do here—not more important than what we do here, but of real importance to what we do here—an attitude that I believe should be universally adopted.

In so far as the recommendations of the Modernisation Committee will enable us the better to examine and scrutinise, I welcome them. In so far as the Government's response to the report is positive, I welcome that, but I should be grateful if the Parliamentary Secretary would touch on the points that I have raised in my short speech.

5.55 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for publishing the White Paper and laying it before the House and congratulate him on doing so. I also thank the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), for the work that he and the Committee have done on the subject. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) kindly made some pleasant comments about the work of the Select Committee on European Legislation, which are very much appreciated.

In my enthusiasm for this important exchange, I cannot escape a sense of foreboding, inasmuch as I feel that I am attending a funeral and a birth at the same time. Tonight, we are ending the life of the Select Committee on European Legislation and starting the life of its successor, the European Scrutiny Committee. I remember hearing, in my early years, that sometimes it was better to celebrate a funeral and mourn a birth, on the basis that

"the newly born had all its trials and tribulations"

to come, and that

"the end of a life ended the misery of living",

but I am sure that that is not the case in this regard. Nevertheless, the Committee that is about to pass on, which I have had the pleasure of chairing, has had its trials and tribulations over the years, and I very much look forward to the new life in the scrutiny process that will be engendered by the proposals.

If I may, I shall further burden the House with a short reflection on the work that has been done since the Committee's inception in 1973. As the hon. Member for South Staffordshire said, the Committee, in its 25-year life, has had one of the busiest agendas of any Select Committee. Its subject matter is not known for its sexiness, but, for the statisticians among us, the European Legislation Committee has dealt with about 35,000 directives and documents—almost four directives a day for the past 25 years.

Sadly, much of that work has not received the recognition that I humbly suggest that it might, and should, have received. Only in the past few years—and, more important, in the past 18 months, under the new Labour Government—has the Committee's work been properly appreciated. I make no complaint about that except to say that, just maybe, the great ignorance that exists—inside and outside this place—on European issues can in small measure be attributed to the lack of political will and/or understanding of the importance of our European Union membership.

The White Paper presented to us today by the Leader of the House marks a watershed in parliamentary procedures. It recognises the importance of scrutiny in our democracy. Paragraph 5 on page 2 of the White Paper states:

"the scrutiny arrangements have not kept pace with the need to ensure comprehensive Parliamentary oversight of developments in the EU and to make transparent and understandable the processes by which EU policy and legislation are made."

That is the issue that we are addressing today.

We have entered a new era of political and constitutional reform. In 18 months, the Government have passed legislation on the devolution of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and London. We have held four referendums. This new era is about good, representative politics and the need for scrutiny within our parliamentary process. As we prepare to enter the next century, better, more effective scrutiny is very much part of that change.

I shall now comment briefly on specific issues in the report. These welcome proposals should be viewed not as the end of the modernisation process, but as the beginning of a modern model of scrutiny. At this juncture, I record my thanks and that of my Committee to the staff, past and present, who have served the European Legislation Committee over the years. Their task of examining, researching, briefing, investigating and reporting is a colossal responsibility which they have taken in their stride. The House owes them a great debt of gratitude, and I so record that this afternoon.

We are delighted that the paper includes most of the suggestions put to the Procedure Committee by the ELC. However, I shall offer one or two comments in order to, first, put down a marker for further consideration; and, secondly, reassure my colleagues on departmental Select Committees that the changes will serve and assist them in the special scrutiny of their Departments. It is not my Committee's intention to step into their areas of responsibility—on the contrary, most of what we do will complement and support their good work. There will be no turf wars.

The ELC did not deal with merit considerations, and the new European Scrutiny Committee will not do so in the future. Our interest in the second and third pillars will be to assess their legal and political significance and/or importance. In practice, the conduit for information will be both ways. That will improve the scrutiny of legislation and offer information support, if required, to our colleagues on other Select Committees.

Our proposal that the ESC should have the right to promote a "Floor debate" was recognised by the Government, but not accepted. The Government conceded that there was merit in our suggestion, but they have not agreed to it at this stage. That is regrettable, but I ask them to keep it in mind as we continue to learn from our experience.

The value of Standing Committee debate has been somewhat undervalued in the past. I am confident that the increase in the number of Standing Committees will add value to and encourage the specialised scrutiny of legislation and documents. That increase is welcome. The Modernisation Committee recommended an increase to five, but three is better than two. Although five would have been better still, I am reasonably comfortable with three. However, I hope that the Government will consider carefully the effectiveness of the extra Standing Committees and, if necessary, revisit the matter at a later stage.

I came to the House in June 1987 and, within a few weeks, I was a member of the European Legislation Committee. I have been its Chairman since 1992, and it has been a great honour to serve with many distinguished right hon. and hon. Members over the years. I have had the privilege of travelling all over Europe and have met Prime Ministers, Presidents and some royalty. I have many happy memories from my membership of the ELC that I will treasure and value. There is also some sadness. When the European Legislation Committee is wound up tonight, I will fondly remember former Members Jimmy Boyce and George Buckley, who served on the Committee and were good personal friends.

In my first 10 years as a member of the ELC, I found myself apologising for the then Conservative Government's xenophobic anti-Europe policy. My first announcement when I met any European colleagues at conferences or meetings was, "I am not a Tory." I am assured that several Conservatives do not share the views of the then Government. However, I am delighted to be a member of a Government who have grasped this moment in our history to embrace the collective advantages of being a major player and influence within the European Union.

The new Labour Government understand and accept readily and enthusiastically that our country's national interests are better protected and advanced by co-operation with our partners than by the narrow nationalism that has done us great harm in Europe and throughout the rest of the international community. This paper is part of that new politics. I welcome it and I applaud the Government for it.

6.6 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): At the risk of contributing to this consensual atmosphere, I wish to place on record my views and those of my colleagues regarding the important work of the Select Committee on European Legislation. I pay tribute to its Chairman, the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), his colleagues and staff who, on behalf of the House, have done extremely important work for the whole nation, which has gone largely unnoticed within this place, let alone outside it.

We would not be discussing this issue if we were not conscious of the fact that there are—in the words of the hon. Member for Clydesdale—inadequacies in the present situation and that we can do better. I agree with everything that he and his Committee and the former Procedure Committee, on which I served under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), have recommended in the past. The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons has based its proposals this evening on those recommendations. As a member of that Committee, I am delighted to add my voice to the recommendations of the Leader of the House and the deputy shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), that we should pass the measure without dissent.

I visited some German farmers two and a half or three years ago and I recall our conversation vividly. They said, "We in Germany implement every single tiny reference in every single directive. Every element of every directive from Brussels is implemented in full. Of course, in France, they do not take any notice and in Italy they do not know that there is such a directive." I was forced to add, "In Britain, my friends, we gold-plate directives." A constant preoccupation of hon. Members on both sides of the House is that, even when directives reach us, we discover that their implications are extremely complicated and convoluted. They are often added to—there is an accretion of different regulations when a directive reaches Whitehall. The House is still grappling with that problem.

The proposals before us improve that situation, but the hon. Member for Clydesdale is absolutely right: this is not the end but the beginning of an improved process. We cannot be satisfied that scrutiny is as effective as it should be, even when the new proposals are in place. I hope that, in trying to improve them, we shall not think that that is the end of the matter. We shall move forward on a transitional and experimental basis.

The terms of reference and the name of the Committee are of little importance, except in demonstrating to the House and to the world outside that we shall take the issue a great deal more seriously than we did in the recent past.

The question is not what we should scrutinise, or even how we should scrutinise it, but when we should do so. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) both spoke of the need for the House to be aware of proposals as they are developing in the European institutions, rather than when they have become a firm proposition. The proposal that a Minister who may be about to attend a meeting of the Council of Ministers should come before the Committee, and explain the range of options that may be available to him and his opposite numbers in the Council, is extremely important.

The section on the Council of Ministers in the document before us represents a significant step forward. If, for example, next week the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, after meeting his colleagues at the Agriculture Council to discuss the important issue of the beef export ban, could come back and explain the process whereby a decision was reached and what the decision was, that would contribute to the transparency and open government to which the Government are committed.

I share the view of the hon. Member for Clydesdale that it would have been preferable if there were five Standing Committees with a smaller membership—perhaps nine. That would be only a slight increase on the proposed three Standing Committees, each with a membership of 13.

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

That would be a sensible way to move forward, as there will still be a considerable work load on the three Committees.

There would have been another advantage, which has not yet been mentioned in the debate: there could have been some cross-reference between membership of the departmental Select Committees and the more specialist Standing Committees. That is difficult to achieve at present and will continue to be difficult with only three Standing Committees, because the necessary range of expertise and the work load will be so great. Some cross-reference and sharing of expertise would be helpful.

My final point relates to the way in which we deal with European business in the Chamber. I have not served on the Standing Committees but, in many cases, after careful analysis of the peculiar way in which a directive has developed and how it will apply in this country, and possibly after a Minister had retreated from his initial position on the proposal, the way in which the Committee reported back to the House left much to be desired. Many hon. Members have felt frustrated that the exercise of scrutiny did not result in effective decision making by all Members in the House. The proposals may offer the possibility of genuine improvement in that process.

We must have enough time to deal properly with European matters in the Chamber. I know that the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), is not a member of the Modernisation Committee, but I hope that he will take back to the Leader of the House the message that the effective involvement of the whole House in the scrutiny process will mean that more business must be transferred from the Floor of the House to some other procedure in a different part of the House.

All the proposals are tentative and experimental, and their effect will be cumulative. We would not expect a dramatic change—that is not how we change our procedure in this place. I know that, having battled on the issue for many years, the right hon. Member for East Devon will agree.

The proposals are an important step forward, but I have one remaining concern. Paragraph 47 states:

"We recommend that Departments individually and the Government collectively provide timely and accurate information to Parliament on European Union matters. If mistakes occur, corrective action must be taken to meet the needs of Parliament. For this purpose, a designation of responsibility as outlined above is essential. The European Legislation Committee"—

which, I think, is a reference to the European Scrutiny Committee—

"should continue to monitor the situation."

As the experiment moves forward, it is important that we monitor it closely. There is a long way to go, and this is a step in the right direction. It is a strength of the House that we never stop permanently—we are always prepared to move on. I believe that we shall have to return to the matter in a few years, to ensure that the process continues to achieve more effective scrutiny of important legislation that affects all our fellow citizens.

6.14 pm

Ms Jenny Jones (Wolverhampton, South-West): I shall not depart from the consensus that is apparent in the debate. I am one of the newest members of the Select Committee on European Legislation. I was keen to be on the Committee and was extremely pleased to be appointed to it, but it was interesting to hear the reaction of some of my colleagues. They wondered why I wanted to be a member of that Select Committee and suggested that it was not the sexiest one. I found that an astonishing remark, as I had not realised that there was a beauty contest among Select Committees.

In the short time that I have served on the Committee, two features have struck me. First, its work is important, because the European Union impinges on all our lives. I have been impressed by the expertise and experience of the members who have served on the Committee much longer than I have. It is pleasing to know that that well of experience has been recognised. There is a good base for the Committee's enhanced role.

Secondly, I was struck by the dedication and hard work of the staff. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said that he was astonished at the amount of work that we get through. I was pleased that the Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), paid tribute to the work of the staff.

I do not disagree with anything that any of the previous speakers have said, but I shall add two comments. First, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House rightly said, whatever we may feel about the United Kingdom's membership of the EU, it touches on all our lives. As an institution, it has changed rapidly and developed significantly since scrutiny in this Parliament began. The way in which we scrutinise European business must keep pace with the rapid developments there.

Another reason why we must improve scrutiny arises from the democratic deficit in the European Union. Everyone knows that the only elected part of the EU, the Parliament, is probably the weakest in terms of balance of power, and the Council of Ministers is probably the strongest. We alone cannot do anything about that, although the Select Committee discusses the matter from time to time.

One of the most significant recommendations is the introduction of pre-Council and post-Council scrutiny, to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) referred. That will enable us to find out much more about what goes on at the Council of Ministers. As that is probably the most powerful of the three institutions that make up the EU, and the one accused of meeting in the greatest secrecy, anything that this Parliament can do to shine a light on the work of the Council of Ministers and to bring greater transparency not only for our sake, but for the sake of the people who voted us here, is valuable.

My second comment relates to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in an intervention. The efficiency and effectiveness of any scrutiny system depend partly on what supports and facilitates it.

The Committee has long advocated the use of information technology and e-mail—the electronic transmission of documents from the EU to the member state Parliaments. Documents have to be received and scrutinised and questions have to be asked within the tight time scale of six weeks, so e-mailing would reduce the time taken to receive documents from 10 days to a matter of hours.

If we are to strengthen scrutiny, we must allow as long as possible for that scrutiny to be effective. We need every minute that is at our disposal. I am pleased to say that,

buried in the back of the report, there is a discussion on the electronic transmission of documents. Last autumn, the Select Committee raised that matter with the then Minister responsible and we were assured that pilots would take place to assess its feasibility. I hope that that matter will be pushed forward, because we are particularly concerned about it.

As I said, I welcome the Select Committee's recommendations. I look forward to the transformation of the European Legislation Committee into the European Scrutiny Committee. I have taken the precaution of looking at the Order Paper and I am pleased to see that my name has been put forward for membership of that Committee, which is a relief.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was right to say that this is an opportunity to bring greater transparency to, and understanding of, the work of the EU which, in turn, will mean greater democracy.

6.21 pm

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): First, I thank those hon. Members who have paid tribute to the original Procedure Committee which made the recommendations on which the scrutiny procedures of the House have been based. I rather feel as though I have been here before, and I have no doubt that I shall be here again.

It is interesting to elaborate on what the Leader of the House said about the success of our scrutiny activities, inadequate though some of us may think they have been. Without doubt, Britain considers the details of European regulations to a much greater extent than any other member state.

There are two interesting alternatives. Members of the Belgian Parliament meet Belgian Members of the European Parliament, but to debate broad European topics rather than regulations. There is no real consideration of regulations at all. Danish Ministers cannot approve a decision in the Council of Ministers until the matter has been considered by the Danish Parliament, but, again, the Danish Parliament does not consider the regulations. They are more or less approved en masse, and they are no great restriction on the Council of Ministers. Therefore, the amount of detail into which the two Committees have gone deserves the greatest praise.

I thank the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) for his work as Chairman of the Select Committee. When he entered the House, he was something of a revolutionary, but the Committee has made him a most responsible Member of the House, something about which I am delighted. As he will know, I say that in the nicest way possible.

The hon. Gentleman is correct about the number of the Committees. He will recall that the original recommendation, way back in the mid-1980s, was that there should be five. At that time, my Government rejected that. I moved an amendment to the motion before the House and, with the Procedure Committee, divided the House, because we believed that there should have been five. Given the range of material to be considered, the relatively small number of 13 Members have a massive job to do, and that frequently discourages the experts from coming forward.

We recommended five then and I am sad to say that, again, the Government have rejected the recommendation of five, limiting it to three. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) is willing to go along with that. The original Procedure Committee felt that the experts in the House on certain subjects should serve on those Committees. If those Committees are broken down, as is suggested in the Modernisation Committee's report on the scrutiny of European business, one sees how the division into five would allow experts on agriculture and health to specialise in one Committee, experts on the Treasury and home affairs to specialise in one Committee and experts on foreign affairs and trade and industry to specialise in one Committee. In those circumstances, specialists would be much more willing to serve on those Committees than they are at the moment.

Even I can quickly calculate that 13 times three is 39, but, as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), and the Select Committee, suggested, a Committee could easily comprise nine Members and, as nine times five is 45, only six additional Members would have to be allocated. In this Parliament, that would be four Labour Members and two Opposition Members. I cannot believe that the Whips could not find that number of Members. Even 11 times five, which is 55, would mean only 16 additional Members—11 Labour Members and 4 Conservatives and one Liberal or other Opposition Member, or three and two, whatever the division may be. With a Labour majority, there would be no great difficulty in finding that number of Members to man the Committees. Therefore, a great opportunity has again been rejected by the House in moving to only three rather than the original recommendation of five.

Mr. Tyler: As the right hon. Gentleman will have heard me say, I very much support him on that. However, he must choose his words with care. Just now, he said that the House has rejected this proposal. Technically, at this moment, the matter has been agreed only through the usual channels—between the main Opposition and those on the Government Front Benches. I support the hon. Gentleman and I hope that, in due course, the Government and the Conservative party will think again.

Sir Peter Emery: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I shall do my best to make the Conservative party see sense on this. I have been trying for 16 years now. I might succeed in another four or five years. We move slowly. We have gone from two to three, but I hope that we can make the last dash fairly quickly.

One thing that has not been dealt with in the report is the problem that arises in a Committee if a Committee decides on something that is contrary to the original motion moved by the Government and contrary to what the Government wish. That may be the Committee's decision but, when the matter then goes to the House, the Government may move the original motion, which is not what the Committee had agreed. Many people do not realise that what the Committee has decided is not what comes before the House.

The great difficulty is that a motion has to be moved by a Minister, and the Government will not move a motion that they do not agree with. To that I say that we should have amended the Standing Orders so that an hon. Member would be allowed to move an amendment to a motion, although the Government would, of course, be able to reject it and then table their own amendment. The aspect that only the original motion, but never the decision of the Committee, is referred to the House is misleading; it should have been dealt with, but it has not.

[Sir Peter Emery]

"The Scrutiny of European Union Business", which was presented to Parliament by the Leader of the House, recommends:

"Informal links with the European Parliament should be encouraged."

Labour Members have said that there should be more visits by all Members of Parliament. That is something with which I do not necessarily disagree, but I believe that Select Committees should take the opportunity that exists within the present regulations on visiting to set up links with European Parliament Committees dealing with the same areas.

Each Select Committee should appoint a rapporteur who would make it his duty to visit either Strasbourg or Brussels—whichever was necessary—to see what a European Parliament Committee was getting up to. In that way, we could have an input before reports were decided. Once those reports have been published, the chances of us having any input are nil.

That process would be fairly involved, but it would mean more direct contact between our Select Committees and the equivalent Committees in the European Parliament. I am not saying that that would be perfect—in many ways, it would be difficult—but it would be a step towards achieving an input for Members of Parliament in decisions made by the Committees of the European Parliament. There would certainly be a strengthening of links between this Parliament and the European Parliament, something that I should like to see happen.

I am delighted that the Government have moved in this direction in respect of the Modernisation Committee's recommendations. With the exception of the Government's proposal on the number of Committees, I commend them to the House.

6.32 pm

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am delighted to participate in the debate as a member of the European Legislation Committee, because this is a watershed in our development. This morning, I awoke as a member of that Committee, but, having checked the Order Paper, I know that I shall awake tomorrow as a member of the European Scrutiny Committee because today we are about to change our Committee's name.

Hon. Members have mentioned the lack of recognition by some of our colleagues for the work of the European Legislation Committee. My constituents sometimes ask what Committee I am on. When I say that I am a member of the European Legislation Committee, they ask, "What is that and what are you up to?" Some of them think that I am involved in some sort of seditious activity to do with Europe.

The right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) made the unusual suggestion that my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), the Chairman of our Committee, was something of a revolutionary before he had any contact with Europe, but has now become a rational man. I venture to suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that some of his colleagues—perhaps through their contact with Europe—have gone in the opposite direction.

The work of our Committee is important in terms of safeguarding the interests of my constituents and of the national interest in Europe, and I am proud and pleased to be a member of it. I sometimes liken our work to that of customs officers at a border. All sorts of directives, regulations and recommendations from the European Commission and the Council of Ministers come across for decision by the Government and the House. Our Committee stands next to the conveyor belt, and when we see something that may have political, legal or financial implications, we stop the belt, unpack that directive or regulation and examine it more closely.

We do this aspect of scrutiny work very well, and that is reflected in the report of the Modernisation Committee and the Government's response. As we come to the end of this Session, the work of our Committee has been given a clean bill of health and our Chairman and the Committee have received a good end-of-term report. However, the recommendations in the Modernisation Committee's report and in the Government's response are shaped by much wider processes than procedural considerations in the House—important as they are—or by the work and the momentum of our Committee itself.

I should highlight the dynamic context which has resulted in the new proposals. On the proactive side, there is a clearly defined need for greater scrutiny of decisions taken in Brussels. My constituents want that, the country wants that and it is good that the Government want that, too. The Committee has the ambition, which I think is shared by the Government, for not only more, but better, scrutiny, and the proposals before us go in that direction. What we do, we should do well, and if anything can be done to enable our Committee to do its work better, that is all to the good.

Many of the proposals in the report and in the Government's response are shaped by that ambition. In particular, the closer co-operation that is foreseen with other Select Committees, the European committees of other national Parliaments in the EU and the European Parliament will lead to a greater level of experience, better information about EU decision making, an exchange of best practice and improved communication between the Government and the House. Other Committees of the House and committees across Europe will be partners, not competitors, in the scrutiny role with a common endeavour to do the job well.

On the reactive side, we should consider these reforms in the context of the evolving nature of the EU, and especially in the context of the treaties of Amsterdam and of Maastricht. In many ways, the report could be read as a parliamentary response to the intergovernmental treaty signed up to at Maastricht by the previous Government.

The Maastricht treaty is worthy of particular emphasis, because much in the report is aimed at scrutiny of the second and third pillar structures. Third pillar scrutiny represents a pyrrhic victory for the Committee, because, subsequently at Amsterdam, many of the those third pillar responsibilities and functions were transferred into the first pillar. Moreover, the present Government have opted out of the aspects relating to asylum, immigration and border control.

The remit of our Committee is being broadened and its responsibilities strengthened. All that will lead to greater and more informed dialogue with our Government about what they are doing in Brussels on our behalf. Thanks to

the report and the Government's response, if we do move towards the stars of the European Union—towards closer co-operation—we shall do so with our feet and those of this Parliament firmly on the ground.

6.38 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I speak with caution because other right hon. and hon. Members have contributed greatly to the scrutiny of European legislation in the House. I wish to make just one point. Last week, as a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee, I went to Brussels for a European Parliament conference on EU fraud and cross-border crime. During the conference, Members of the European Parliament of different parties asked me what the British public thought about their proposals to create a common EU criminal law system to cope with those problems, a common judicial area and a common police force. I had to scratch my head and tell the truth: the British public are not aware of such proposals. "All right," they said, "What is the British Parliament's view on those proposals?" Again, I scratched my head and said that many of us in the House were unaware of much that comes from the European Parliament and other institutions.

Some of our Select Committees, such as the Home Affairs Select Committee, should take a real interest in what happens in the European Parliament and elsewhere. Whether we like it is irrelevant; we should know more. I do not feel well informed enough. If this discussion results in better oversight and scrutiny, and more awareness among our colleagues of what is happening among our European colleagues, that must be good.

6.40 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) for his work. I have felt the heat when he has scrutinised me, as a former Minister, on fishery matters and I know the excellence of the job that he did. The role of Fisheries Minister introduced me to Europe and made me realise that the House gets involved far too late in the process of scrutiny to have a real influence on shaping United Kingdom policies when they go before the Council. I urge the Parliamentary Secretary who will reply to this debate, and the Leader of the House, to look again at mechanisms whereby Parliament may be advised much earlier on some of the formative thinking that is going on.

When I was a Minister, both in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and at the Treasury, I used to get my officials to produce for me a chart showing all the Committees that they attended regularly in Brussels so that I knew of the forthcoming attractions. I was surprised and sometimes shocked at the amount of new ideas and legislation that was coming along, on which I had not received proper briefing. I therefore urge the Parliamentary Secretary and the Leader of the House to find a way of advising the House what is going on so that we may have a much earlier sight of what is happening and can take action.

I strongly support other hon. Members who mentioned greater transparency. The more we know about what is happening, and the earlier we know it, the better. I also endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who wanted greater opportunities to travel to Europe. Some colleagues do not use their one trip a year because one visit is not enough to develop a relationship, specialise in a subject, make appointments to visit officials, and so on. If there were proper opportunities to visit, we would be better informed and scrutiny would be much improved.

We should all do as much as we can to improve newspapers' reporting of European activity. If we are to get the necessary backing from the public, they must be much better informed about European legislation and activity. I endorse and support the House's attempts to improve scrutiny, but it would be better if we could be involved earlier.

6.43 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) talks about the newspapers reporting Europe. Would that they report what goes on in this place more fully. I doubt whether a single word will appear on the non-existent parliamentary pages tomorrow about this short, informative and important debate. I congratulate all those who have taken part in it, including seven Back Benchers. It is good to listen to the wise experience of those who have served for a long time on Committees. We heard from two new Members—the hon. Members for Wolverhampton, South-West (Ms Jones) and for Wimbledon (Mr. Casale)—who were on the Select Committee and will be translated on to the new Committee, and we heard from the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood).

We should all ponder what they said, just as we should take extremely seriously the points made by my exceptionally experienced colleague, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery). I take his strictures in good part. It is important that we look at new Committees and see exactly how they work. Although we were persuaded by the Government's arguments that, to have three with 13 members had a lot of merit, my right hon. Friend made a good point about having five with 11 members. The hon. Member for Clydesdale echoed that point. When people with so much experience and knowledge of examining European documents and directives say that, we must listen carefully. I hope that the Minister agrees that we must monitor carefully just how the new Committees work.

I do not want to divide the House this evening. I hope that, in the spirit of consensus that has prevailed throughout the debate, we can agree to the new orders and then monitor their operation carefully. It has been instructive to listen to my right hon. Friends the Members for East Devon and for Fylde and my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) discuss closer liaison with the European Parliament. As I said in my opening remarks, we must have closer liaison. We should listen to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon in that regard. When the new parliamentary building opens in a couple of years' time, it would be sensible to have one room available for our friends and colleagues from the European Parliament to use as of right on a regular basis to meet Members of this House. I would welcome such an innovation and I hope that it would commend itself to other right hon. and hon. Members.

I promised the Minister that I would not erode the time in which he wishes to respond. With those few words, therefore, I wish the orders good speed.

6.46 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I have listened carefully to the views expressed during the debate and I am pleased that the House has welcomed the package of measures that we are presenting today to improve the process by which we consider European business. May I add my personal commendation to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) who, the whole House agrees, has done a splendid job in chairing the European Legislation Committee? I hope that the Committee will shortly be reborn and he will again take up the challenge of ensuring that legislation that comes before the House is scrutinised even more widely and deeply than hitherto.

I commend the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) on the generally supportive stance that he has taken on behalf of the official Opposition, and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who has offered, in the nicest possible way, constructive support in the criticisms that he has made of some of the measures before the House this evening.

Ensuring that the House can properly scrutinise European Union business and hold Ministers to account for their actions in the Council of Ministers has universal support throughout the House. The measures proposed today are the culmination of a thorough examination of the scrutiny process undertaken by the European Legislation Committee, the Procedure Committee and the Modernisation Committee, as well as by the Government, and respond to the range of recommendations made by those Committees.

The changes cover matters of principle—for example, they will allow the House fully to scrutinise business under the second and third pillars—and will extend coverage of the scrutiny reserve resolution. In addition, the procedural elements of the current process will be improved, including arrangements for debating European issues and providing a framework for other departmental Select Committees to become more involved in the scrutiny process. The three Committees are to be commended on their work.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire talked about taking these matters on the Floor of the House. The House will recall that, as well as specific debates on European Union documents, each year the House has two more general debates on developments in the European Union, particularly the business to be taken at European Council meetings. In most instances, a Standing Committee debate is the earliest opportunity and most effective way for hon. Members to question Ministers and debate European Union documents. The Modernisation Committee did not recommend any change in the procedure for debates on the Floor of the House. However, it is our intention, where appropriate, to bring matters on the Floor of the House.

The issue of a national Parliament office was also raised. The House authorities have done considerable preparatory work for today's debate. If the House approves the Modernisation Committee's report, a formal proposal will be made for consideration by the House of Commons Commission at the appropriate time.

A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for South Staffordshire and my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), referred to the EU travel scheme. The current scheme was introduced in 1991 by resolution of the House, and has a set budget of £250,000 per annum. The cost of individual journeys comes from the vote for MPs' paying allowances, so the Leader of the House is responsible for that, not the domestic Committees.

In recent years, some hon. Members have availed themselves of that allowance to visit European institutions, so as better to apprise themselves of the work of those institutions. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has made it abundantly clear that she is prepared to consider how we can deal with those matters with greater flexibility and within budget constraints, so that hon. Members can make such visits on a different basis.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire asked about the arrangements after devolution. I repeat what my right hon. Friend the Leader of House said. We shall ensure that proper arrangements are put in place for the devolved bodies to scrutinise European Union business, and for their views to be taken into account by the Government. The precise arrangements are still being considered, but the devolved bodies themselves will examine how best to carry out their scrutiny function and how their views can be fed into the wider scrutiny process.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It would help the scrutiny and information process if the explanatory memorandums attached to each piece of European legislation were published. They set out the arguments for it, including information on ministerial responsibility, policy implications, compliance cost assessments and the process of consultation. They are available on the yellow forms, but if a consolidated weekly edition were laid before the House and made available to the other Assemblies and Parliaments in the United Kingdom and to pressure groups and organisations, that would help us to understand what is going on.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government consistently look for ways to reduce the paper chase. We are committed to reducing the amount of paper produced by government. However, we shall consider my hon. Friend's suggestion.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall referred to the need to have more debates on the Floor of the House. I am mindful of the difficulties faced by smaller parties in the scrutiny process. One reason for keeping the size of the Standing Committee at 13 is to ensure that the representation of other parties is maintained. The Government have eight members, the official Opposition have three and other parties have two. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Ms Jones) referred to the electronic transmission of EU documents. Only last week, I attended a meeting of Ministers in Vienna, at which the United Kingdom Government were seen as a brand leader in trying to achieve a better system of electronic communication. Work on that specific issue is under way to produce an effective system for the electronic receipt of EU documents in capital cities throughout the European Union. A pilot system is being developed and evaluated. It has been particularly difficult to secure agreement on the systems and the architecture required to introduce such a system across all 15 member states.

We respect the view that the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) has expressed for some years. We must reflect what the Committee has agreed.

The Modernisation Committee did not recommend to the House any such change. As the right hon. Gentleman said, he did not persuade the Conservative Government to change the procedure. It must ultimately be for the Government to decide what is contained in the motion they put to the House.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) rightly drew attention to the importance of departmental Select Committees examining European Union issues. The Government agree with that, and some of the minor Standing Order changes are designed to effect that improved relationship.

I believe that the improvements that the House is asked to support represent a truly comprehensive package that will continue to keep our scrutiny arrangements among the most effective in Europe. That is shown by the consensus that has been reached this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Seventh Report from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on the Scrutiny of European Business (HC 791) and takes note of the White Paper on the Scrutiny of European Business (Cm. 4095).

Resolved,

That the Resolution of the House of 24th October 1990 relating to European Community Legislation be rescinded and the following Resolution be made:

That,

(1) No Minister of the Crown should give agreement in the Council or in the European Council to any proposal for European Community legislation or for a common position or joint action under Title V or a joint position, joint action or convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union—

(a) which is still subject to scrutiny (that is, on which the European Scrutiny Committee has not completed its scrutiny) or

(b) which is awaiting consideration by the House (that is, which has been recommended by the European Scrutiny Committee for consideration pursuant to Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) but in respect of which the House has not come to a Resolution).

(2) In this Resolution, any reference to agreement to a proposal includes—

(a) agreement to a programme, plan or recommendation for European Community legislation;

(b) political agreement;

(c) in the case of a proposal on which the Council acts in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189b of the Treaty of Rome (co-decision), agreement to a common position, to a joint text, and to confirmation of the common position (with or without amendments proposed by the European Parliament); and

(d) in the case of a proposal on which the Council acts in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189c of the Treaty of Rome (co-operation), agreement to a common position.

(3) The Minister concerned may, however, give agreement—

(a) to a proposal which is still subject to scrutiny if he considers that it is confidential, routine or trivial or is substantially the same as a proposal on which scrutiny has been completed;

(b) to a proposal which is awaiting consideration by the House if the European Scrutiny Committee has indicated that agreement need not be withheld pending consideration.

(4) The Minister concerned may also give agreement to a proposal which is still subject to scrutiny or awaiting consideration by the House if he decides that for special reasons agreement should be given; but he should explain his reasons—

(a) in every such case, to the European Scrutiny Committee at the first opportunity after reaching his decision; and

(b) in the case of a proposal awaiting consideration by the House, to the House at the first opportunity after giving agreement.

(5) In relation to any proposal which requires adoption by unanimity, abstention shall, for the purposes of paragraph (4), be treated as giving agreement.

Resolved,

That, upon the entering into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Resolution on Scrutiny of European Business (No. 2) shall have effect with the following modifications:

In paragraph (1) the words "a common position or joint action under Title V or a joint position, joint action or convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union" are replaced by the words "a common strategy, joint action or common position under Title V or a common position, framework decision, decision or convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union"; and

in paragraph (2)(c) the words "a common position, to a joint text, and to confirmation of the common position (with or without amendments proposed by the European Parliament)" are replaced by the words "a common position, to an act in the form of a common position incorporating amendments proposed by the European Parliament, and to a joint text".

Ordered,

That, with effect from the beginning of the next Session, Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be replaced by the following Standing Order (European Standing Committees):

".—(1) There shall be three standing committees, called European Standing Committees, to which shall stand referred for consideration on motion, unless the House otherwise orders, such European Union documents as defined in Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee) as may be recommended by the European Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

(2) If a motion that specified European Union documents as aforesaid shall not stand referred to a European Standing Committee is made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business, the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(3) Each European Standing Committee shall consist of thirteen Members nominated for the duration of a Parliament by the Committee of Selection; and in nominating such Members, the Committee of Selection shall—

(a) have regard to the qualifications of the Members nominated and to the composition of the House; and

(b) have power to discharge Members from time to time, and to appoint others in substitution.

(4) The quorum of a European Standing Committee shall be three, excluding the chairman.

(5) Any Member, though not nominated to a European Standing Committee, may take part in the committee's proceedings and may move amendments to any motion made as provided in paragraphs (7) and (8) below, but such Member shall not make any motion, vote or be counted in the quorum; provided that a Minister of the Crown who is a Member of this House but not nominated to the committee may make a motion as provided in paragraphs (7) and (8) below; and the Government may appoint the precedence of notices of motion to be considered in each committee.

(6) The European Standing Committees, and the principal subject matter of the European Union documents to be referred to each, shall be as set out below; and in making recommendations for further consideration, the European Scrutiny Committee shall specify the

committee to which in its opinion the documents ought to be referred; and subject to paragraph (2) of this order, the documents shall be referred to that committee accordingly

European Standing Committees	*Principal subject matter*
	Matters within the responsibility of the following Departments:
A	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Environment, Transport and the Regions; Forestry Commission; (and analogous responsibilities of Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices)
B	HM Treasury (including HM Customs and Excise); Social Security; Foreign and Commonwealth Office; International Development; Home Office; Lord Chancellor's Department; together with any matters not otherwise allocated by this Order
C	Trade and Industry; Employment and Education; Culture, Media and Sport; Health

(7) The chairman may permit Ministers of the Crown to make statements and to answer questions thereon put by Members, in respect of each motion relative to a European Union document or documents referred to a European Standing Committee of which a Minister shall have given notice; but no question shall be taken after the expiry of a period of one hour from the commencement of the first such statement:

Provided that the chairman may, if he sees fit, allow questions to be taken for a further period of not more than half an hour after the expiry of that period.

(8) Following the conclusion of the proceedings under the previous paragraph, the motion referred to therein may be made, to which amendments may be moved; and, if proceedings thereon have not been previously concluded, the chairman shall interrupt the consideration of such motion and amendments when the committee shall have sat for a period of two and a half hours, and shall then put forthwith successively:

(a) the question on any amendment already proposed from the chair; and

(b) the main question (or the main question, as amended).

The chairman shall thereupon report to the House any resolution to which the committee has come, or that it has come to no resolution, without any further question being put.

(9) If any motion is made in the House in relation to any European Union document in respect of which a report has been made to the House in accordance with paragraph (8) of this order, the Speaker shall forthwith put successively—

(a) the question on any amendment selected by her which may be moved;

(b) the main question (or the main question, as amended);

and proceedings in pursuance of this paragraph, though opposed, may be decided after the expiration of the time for opposed business.

(10) With the modifications provided in this order, the following Standing Orders shall apply to European Standing Committees:

No. 85 (Chairmen of standing committees);

No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees); and

No. 89 (Procedure in standing committees)."

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 143 (Select Committee on European Legislation) be replaced by the following Standing Order (European Scrutiny Committee):

(1) There shall be a select committee, to be called the European Scrutiny Committee, to examine European Union documents and—

(a) to report its opinion on the legal and political importance of each such document and, where it considers appropriate, to report also on the reasons for its opinion and on any matters of principle, policy or law which may be affected;

(b) to make recommendations for the further consideration of any such document pursuant to Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees); and

(c) to consider any issue arising upon any such document or group of documents, or related matters.

The expression 'European Union document' in this order and in Standing Orders No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), No. 89 (Procedure in standing committees) and No. 119 (European Standing Committees) means—

(i) any proposal under the Community Treaties for legislation by the Council or the Council acting jointly with the European Parliament;

(ii) any document which is published for submission to the European Council, the Council or the European Central Bank;

(iii) any proposal to define a common position or for joint action under Title V of the Treaty on European Union which is prepared for submission to the Council;

(iv) any proposal for a joint position, joint action or a convention under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union which is prepared for submission to the Council;

(v) any document (not falling within (ii), (iii) or (iv) above) which is published by one Union institution for or with a view to submission to another Union institution and which does not relate exclusively to consideration of any proposal for legislation;

(vi) any other document relating to European Union matters deposited in the House by a Minister of the Crown.

(2) The committee shall consist of sixteen Members.

(3) The committee and any sub-committee appointed by it shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker.

(4) The committee shall have power to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(5) The committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time.

(6) The quorum of the committee shall be five.

(7) The committee shall have power to appoint sub-committees and to refer to such sub-committees any of the matters referred to the committee.

(8) Every such sub-committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(9) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before such sub-committees.

(10) The quorum of every such sub-committee shall be two.

(11) The committee shall have power to seek from any committee specified in paragraph (14) of this order its opinion on any European Union document, and to require a reply to such a request within such time as it may specify.

(12) The committee or any sub-committee appointed by it shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee specified in paragraph (14) of this order or with any committee of the Lords on the European Communities, or any sub-committee of that committee, for the purposes of deliberating or examining witnesses.

(13) The committee shall have power to communicate to any committee specified in paragraph (14) of this order its evidence or any other document relating to matters of common interest.

(14) The committees specified for the purposes of this order are those appointed under Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) including any sub-committees of such committees, the Select Committee on Public Administration, the Committee of Public Accounts, and the Environmental Audit Committee.

(15) Unless the House otherwise orders, each member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a Member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

Ordered,

That the following consequential Amendments to Standing Orders be made:

In Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents), line 3, leave out "Community documents" and insert "Union documents (as defined in Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee))".

In Standing Order No. 89 (Procedure in Standing Committees), line 18, leave out "Community" and insert "Union".

In Standing Order No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration), line 20, at the end insert:

"(c) to communicate to the European Scrutiny Committee its evidence and any other document relating to matters of common interest; and

(d) to meet concurrently with the European Scrutiny Committee, or any sub-committee thereof, for the purposes of deliberating or taking evidence.";

In Standing Order No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts),

line 17, after "departments)" insert "and to the European Scrutiny Committee",

line 21, at end add:

"(4) The committee shall have power to meet concurrently with the European Scrutiny Committee, or any sub-committee thereof, for the purposes of deliberating or taking evidence."

In Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments)

line 31, after "and" insert "to the European Scrutiny Committee,"

line 39, at end insert "or with the European Scrutiny Committee or any sub-committee thereof for the purposes of deliberating or taking evidence;"

line 46, after "thereof" insert ", or with the European Scrutiny Committee or any sub-committee thereof,"

In Standing Order No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee), in line 30, after "thereof" insert ", or with the European Scrutiny Committee or any sub-committee thereof,".

Ordered,

That, with effect from the coming into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam, Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee) shall have effect with the following Amendments:

line 21, leave out "to define a common position or for joint action" and insert "for a common strategy, a joint action or a common position";

line 23, after "Council" insert "or to the European Council"; and

line 24, leave out "joint position, joint action" and insert "common position, framework decision, decision".

Ordered,

That Mr. Ben Bradshaw, Mr. Colin Breed, Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. Roger Casale, Mr. William Cash, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. Jim Dobbin, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mrs. Linda Gilroy, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Ms Jennifer Jones, Mrs. Rosemary McKenna, Mr. Jim Marshall, Mr. Bill Rammell, Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Shaun Woodward be members of the European Scrutiny Committee.—[*Mr. Allen.*]

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Ms Elizabeth Filkin be appointed Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on the retirement of Sir Gordon Downey, KCB, on the terms of the Report of the House of Commons Commission (HC 1143), dated 9th November 1998.—*[Mr. Kirkwood.]*

6.57 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): It is only right that we should welcome the new Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and pay tribute to the retiring commissioner, Sir Gordon Downey. One of the advantages we have in this country is that a number of individuals have come up through the public service and have felt it right to dedicate themselves to public service, even though the financial rewards are not as great as they may be elsewhere. Gordon Downey is an exemplar of such an approach.

After the war, there was a common feeling among some people that they should repay the work that was done for them by their predecessors. In the 1980s, that attitude did not receive high favour. It was almost mocked, and it was felt that those who did not make use of their talents and make a lot of money were failing the country and themselves. That was an appalling attitude. Some people were scorned for their work for the country and for the community. The idea that society was not as important as the individual failed to take account of the enormous value that we get from people who devote themselves to raising and maintaining standards of public life.

Gordon Downey is an outstanding public servant. It is a great privilege to be in public service: it is not a job like any other. The fact that we have so many such people is a tribute to the dedication that they have brought to the public service and to the civil service. Sir Gordon also worked with the Public Accounts Committee for some years. When I was asked whether he would be a suitable Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, I was delighted: I could not imagine that anyone else could do the job as well as he could. My judgment has been borne out by events.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Does my right hon. Friend feel that Elizabeth Filkin should be given more resources than have been given to Sir Gordon Downey in order to carry out the work as effectively and comprehensively as possible?

Mr. Sheldon: Sir Gordon never claimed to be short of resources, although few were available. He carried out his duties with great dedication and, through his ability, was capable of dealing with every question that arose. Of course, he had a superb background for the job. He was in the Treasury—I knew him there more than 20 years ago—and then became Comptroller and Auditor-General of the old Exchequer and Audit Department before it became the National Audit Office. He retired from there to become chairman of the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association. As he says himself, he retired from numerous jobs to take up ever more jobs that fitted his experience and abilities.

Sir Gordon retired from that job to become ombudsman for two newspapers. He retired from that job to become a regulator of hospital authorities. If we ever wished to

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appoint a "conscience of the nation", Sir Gordon would clearly be a prominent candidate. He has undertaken his work splendidly. Following his examination of more than 40 complaints that were brought to the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, the results were unanimous. Unanimity flowed from the work that he produced for the Committee. When he eventually retired, we asked him for his views, which are contained in our 19th report.

A growing tradition is for an outstanding public servant to be asked, at the end of his service, to describe the lessons that he has learnt, so that they can be passed on. That was done on a number of occasions in the Public Accounts Committee, and—as can be seen from our 19th report—it was done in the case of the retiring parliamentary commissioner. Sir Gordon told us that the disciplinary system had worked well. He also told us that he would like to see a statute of limitations—that in too many instances people had delved far into the past, when attitudes were rather different, and that such actions might not have been in accordance with the standards that we now expect.

If the public perception of the work of the House of Commons has improved—as I hope it has—much of that improvement must be due to Sir Gordon's work. That, I think, is the finest farewell tribute that could be offered. We should be judged according to whether the public perceive us in a way that would be recognisable 20 or 30 years ago—allowing for some criticisms; the House will always receive criticisms.

When Elizabeth Filkin appeared before the Standards and Privileges Committee this morning, we were able to discuss her role. She will be taking on the kind of work that Sir Gordon did so well. It is intended that she should work four days a week, but that may not be necessary: we hope that the amount of work, which was initially large, will diminish as new standards are more widely recognised. People now accept standards that were produced two or three years ago, and I trust that that will mean that far fewer representations will be made to the commissioner.

We thank Sir Gordon Downey for all the splendid work that he has done. He laid down a road for others to follow, and that is one of the great tributes that we can pay him.

7.4 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I want to say two things, very briefly. First, let me join the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) in paying tribute to Sir Gordon Downey's work. The first holder of any post has a huge responsibility, because he establishes the framework within which the post develops, and maps out a way forward. Sir Gordon found himself in the middle, between two of the most powerful forces in a democratic society—a sovereign Parliament and a free press—at a time when relationships between the two were deteriorating. He discharged one of the most difficult jobs in the public sector with patience, diligence and tact. As the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne said, he has helped to begin to restore the House's reputation, and we all owe him our gratitude.

Secondly, I want to support the appointment of Elizabeth Filkin. As Financial Secretary to the Treasury, I encountered her when she was adjudicator for the Inland Revenue. I was impressed by her commitment to her job and her staff, but, crucially, I was impressed by the fact that she retained the confidence of the Revenue, the body that she was investigating. That showed that she was fair, and that her work commanded respect. I looked at her latest report, which was commended for

"good plain English and clear strong messages"—

a welcome contrast to the legislative prose with which most of us deal for most of the time.

I support Elizabeth Filkin's nomination, commend her to the House and wish her well.

7.5 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I promise to be brief.

I add my grateful acknowledgement to Sir Gordon Downey. As the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) said, Sir Gordon's integrity and sterling work have helped to restore the reputation of Members of Parliament, which was at a low ebb when he was appointed.

I hope that Elizabeth Filkin will be given the resources that she needs. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said that Sir Gordon Downey never complained about what might have been seen as sparse resources and facilities. Let us hope that Elizabeth Filkin's work load diminishes over time—that would be a fine reflection on this place—but I hope that, if she needs more resources, the House will ensure that they are provided.

Let me repeat my thanks to a fine and honourable man.

7.7 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I cannot promise to be as brief as the other speakers, but I consider this to be an important debate. I think that the House should take the appointment of a new Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards very seriously, because it is a sensitive appointment. Apart from anything else, it commands a salary that is almost twice what Members of Parliament receive, for four days' work a week. I invite any hon. Member who works for only four days a week to put his or her hand up. I doubt that I shall see many hands rise.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): They are the ones who are not here.

Mr. Howarth: They have been sent on an away day by the Labour Whips.

When Sir Gordon was appointed, his salary of £72,000 was more than double that of a Member of Parliament—then about £33,000. In an article written in 1995, Lord Renton, then Member of Parliament for Mid-Sussex, said of the discrepancy:

"This is like paying the company night watchman twice as much as the sales director."

He made a valid point. It needs to be taken into account when we consider these matters.

Sir Gordon Downey's appointment unquestionably reinforced in the public mind the idea that the House had something to be ashamed of. The vast majority of hon. Members work extremely hard. They are diligent. They generally pursue issues in the way in which they believe

they need to be pursued, promoting not a partial interest, but one that they have formed out of conviction, so it is unfortunate that Sir Gordon Downey's appointment—far from helping to reduce the public disaffection for the House, as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) believes—helped to reinforce the idea that there was something deeply dishonourable about the House. I do not believe that to be true. Of course there have been problems, but they did not warrant the sort of attack that was made on the honour of the House.

I do not know Elizabeth Filkin; I have not had the privilege. I was not on the House of Commons Commission. I am not a member of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, so I have not met her. Therefore, I have relied only on what I have read in the newspaper. Last week, I read an interesting article in *The Times* that suggested that her credentials were excellent:

"For the past five years she has gained a reputation as an investigator of complaints made against the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Contributions Agency."

It was also suggested that

"The world of Westminster may seem a fitting job for a former social worker and childcare expert who has written several academic books on dealing with errant charges."

I hope that she has left all that behind her, because we are not errant charges in need of being taken in hand by a schoolmistress.

One of the things that I noticed on returning to the House after a five-year absence is how much we are now employees. I felt like an employee rather than an hon. Member: the number of forms one has to fill in; we have to do this, that and the other. Therefore, I hope that Elizabeth Filkin will not regard her task as primarily to bring people to book.

I draw some comfort from something that Elizabeth Filkin was quoted as saying by Valerie Elliott in *The Times*:

"I am aware that all of us can make mistakes and look foolish. One can always reflect on how things could have been done better."

I hope that she will bring that outlook to the discharge of her responsibilities. As every right hon. and hon. Member knows, we have immense pressures on us. There is no spare time in the day, and hardly any at night. For what it is worth, I was telephoned at a quarter to 6 this morning by Talk Radio and invited to give my views on an issue.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Did Talk Radio pay you?

Mr. Howarth: Talk Radio pays, does it? Well, it did not pay me. I put the telephone down, but I shall be looking for a handsome apology for having been roused from my slumbers, having got to bed at 2.30 am, after working late in the House.

Hon. Members work hard. There are great pressures on us. There are many competing priorities: our duties to our constituents, in the House and to our families. It is possible that, being frail and human, occasionally we will make mistakes. I am sure that all hon. Members think that there are things that they have done or omitted to do that may have been better not done or done, and that they regret. I hope that, in acknowledging human frailty, Miss Filkin, or Mrs. Filkin, whatever she is, will be good enough to understand our frailties in this place and not encourage those elements of the media who are sitting up there like vultures, seeking to trip up Members of Parliament at every turn.

The other day, I was rung up by a newspaper, not a radio station, that suggested that I had tabled three questions on which I should have declared an interest. The whole tenor of the conversation was that, somehow, I had behaved, "Of course, not improperly, Mr. Howarth," but that I had been in breach of the rules.

I checked with the Registrar of Members' Interests and I was not in breach of the rules, but there are journalists sitting there, some aided and abetted by Labour Members, who do not like the idea of Members of Parliament having outside interests, and who seek simply to trip up Members of Parliament for some minor omission that in no way reflects on their integrity or the way in which they conduct themselves in the House. Therefore, as I say, I hope that Elizabeth Filkin will bear those points in mind.

I hope that Elizabeth Filkin will learn some of the lessons of the past few years. It is going to be her responsibility, if the House is minded to approve her appointment, to uphold the dignity of Parliament; that is one of the charges that will be upon her, but I urge her to regard that as a two-way street and not simply a question of investigating complaints against Members about things that they may have omitted to do.

I hope that Elizabeth Filkin will regard it as her duty to protect the integrity of Parliament by ensuring that those who bring unfounded and serious allegations against Members pay some penalty, once it is decided that their charges are baseless. That is why I shall not join those right hon. and hon. Members who wish to salute the departure of Sir Gordon Downey; I do not. I think that he has been a disgrace—*[Interruption.]* The House may not like to hear it, but we have free speech in this place and I believe that he has behaved, in some respects, disgracefully. I shall tell the House why I am particularly exercised.

Soon after returning to the House last year, I went to see Sir Gordon Downey in respect of one investigation that he had recently undertaken and concluded, a serious investigation where allegations were made against the then Home Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), that he had been guilty of taking bribes of no less than £1 million from Mr. Tiny Rowland—the complaint was made by Mr. Al Fayed.

That was duly investigated by Sir Gordon. Shortly before the general election of 1997, he dismissed the allegations as baseless, but they had all been paraded all over the newspapers, and Labour Members could revel in the idea that there was no smoke without fire and that a senior Minister was involved; it was great stuff for the sleaze machine and all the rest of it. When Sir Gordon found, of course, that there was no case to answer, that appeared as a footnote in the newspapers, but the damage had been done.

I said to Sir Gordon, "Having found that the accusation was baseless, why did you not require that Al Fayed be summoned to the Bar of the House to apologise?" "Oh, Mr. Howarth, we could not possibly do that," he said. "Why not?" I asked. "Because that would deter other people from making complaints," he said.

That was an absolutely disgraceful dereliction of the duty of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. He should have been far more robust. A grave charge was

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made against an hon. Member, which reflected on all of us, at least all of those who were in the House at the time. Sir Gordon failed miserably in upholding the dignity of the House by failing to require, or at least to recommend to the Committee, that Mr. Al Fayed be brought before the House to answer for what he had done. It was on the basis of that conversation with Sir Gordon that I felt deeply depressed about the way in which he had conducted his business.

The House will know, because I have raised it here before, that I believe that the manner in which Sir Gordon dealt with the case of Mr. Neil Hamilton was also a dereliction of duty. Sir Gordon's whole case was based on compelling evidence that Mr. Hamilton had taken money. He could not determine how much money Mr. Hamilton had taken from Mr. Al Fayed, how he had taken the money, when he had taken the money and, despite having crawled through his accounts, what he had done with the money. Nevertheless, it was good enough for Sir Gordon Downey to find that there was compelling evidence.

The truth is that Sir Gordon Downey rejected the original claims made by *The Guardian*—which has been part of the overall conspiracy, in cahoots with some Labour Members—that Mr. Hamilton had been paid via Mr. Ian Greer. Nevertheless, after finding that those claims had not stuck, Al Fayed made other accusations—which, when they too did not stick, he changed for a third time.

In his "compelling evidence", Sir Gordon relied on the evidence of Mr. Al Fayed's employees. If I may detain the House for a moment—I have rather a lot of l[illegible] on the matter—I remind hon. Members that, at para[illegible]h 800 of the Committee's first report, last July, Sir Gordon said that Ms Bond, who is Mr. Al Fayed's right-hand lady, and Mr. Bromfield, who was the doorkeeper at 60 Park lane, the location of Mr. Al Fayed's headquarters—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Will my hon. Friend allow me to intervene?

Mr. Howarth: When I have finished this point, I shall of course allow my hon. Friend to intervene.

Sir Gordon stated that those people

"impressed me as reliable witnesses and I found no discrepancies in their evidence which could not be accounted for by uncertainties of recollection after a period of 10 years."

Unlike Mr. Bromfield, Mr. Hamilton was allowed no such deficiency in his recollection.

Mr. Bromfield testified that Mr. Hamilton had picked up envelopes at 60 Park lane—which of course never happened. It has now been revealed that, for about four months, Mr. Bromfield regularly handed over envelopes to Miss Francesca Pollard, who was, and acknowledges that she was, in Al Fayed's pay. Mr. Bromfield could not remember her, but he could remember Mr. Hamilton, who was never there. He was a totally unreliable witness. He was one of many such witnesses.

Sir Gordon completely failed in pursuing a course of natural justice. Charges of such a nature should have been judged on the standard of beyond reasonable doubt—which Sir Gordon did not apply—and not on the balance of probabilities. It is extremely interesting that he failed to call key witnesses who would have told him that those employees were unreliable. I remind the House that those employees appeared only at the 59th minute of the 11th hour. They had held their tongues for three years, and came forward only three days before the case was due to go to court.

Sir Gordon completely refused to take the evidence of Mr. Christoph Betterman, who had been no less than a director and vice-chairman of Harrods.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I said that I would give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley). I should do that, and then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I say this with some hesitation. If my hon. Friend has already dealt with the issues with which he wanted to deal, my remarks will be unnecessary. However, if he is thinking of going into the matter in some depth, I should tell him that, when I was involved in a High Court action, I was cautioned to be rather cautious about taking up issues that might be further determined by a court. I do not want to say any more than that, but I have a fear.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that point to my attention. He makes a fair point, to which I shall of course have regard. I do not want to take much longer, but I should give way to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

Mr. Mitchell: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I do not have a legal warning, but merely say that—on the occasion of the retirement of a very distinguished public servant—the tactic of raking over old, dead coals and going over evidence again is not only ungracious but downright wrong. However, if the hon. Gentlemen is going to do that, why does he not declare his own interest as a close friend of the man about whom he is talking, and as someone who was coupled with him in a libel action and gained damages with him from the BBC?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We should not deal with issues concerning the BBC and events of some time ago, as they have nothing to do with the motion. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) is speaking within the rules of debate. If he were not, I would soon stop him. However, I also remind him that hon. Members have a tradition of being careful not to malign those with no protection.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the mover of the motion, on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, may I have some guidance? The report that we have tabled deals with the nomination of a candidate and is essentially about welcoming a new person to the job. Therefore is it technically in order—as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said—to rake over the coals?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I said to the hon. Member for Aldershot—and as he should know by now—

the occupant of the Chair would not allow the debate to go out of order. The report mentions the work done by Sir Gordon Downey. The hon. Member should have mentioned occasionally the new commissioner, which he has done. However, I reiterate that there is a tradition in the House of being careful in dealing with privilege. An hon. Member who is attacked by another hon. Member will have an opportunity to rebut, but hon. Members are careful about using our privilege in the Chamber.

Mr. Howarth: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am most grateful to you for making a very considered response. I have attempted to conduct myself in a manner that I hope the House will regard as being as courteous as possible in the circumstances.

I tell the hon. Member for Great Grimsby that every hon. Member knows that I am a close friend of Neil Hamilton; I do not have to declare that. Moreover, I tell the hon. Gentleman that his comments were unworthy of him as a man of principle. I am fighting for a principle, and he, too, should be prepared to fight for a principle. The principle is that a man in this country is innocent unless proved otherwise.

Neil Hamilton has not been proved to have taken the money. The Committee concluded that it did not have evidence that he had taken the money. I am therefore not attempting to rake over old coals. However, I shall not join in the tribute paid by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) to Sir Gordon Downey. I do not share my right hon. Friend's view. I believe that Sir Gordon has failed to discharge his duty, and I am entitled to say so in the House.

I have publicly expressed that view, and I have told Sir Gordon Downey on the telephone that I wish to call for his dismissal. He has not been shy in replying to me. He is an unelected appointee of the House who should be accountable to the House. I feel that he has not been properly accountable to the House. When challenged about my views, he asserted in *The Daily Telegraph* that my opinions were a matter of "total indifference" to him. All I can say is that no public official has the right to speak in such terms about the opinions of an elected Member of this place.

Sir Gordon has been quite happy to defend himself. He has made some outrageous remarks. After seeing something about the 19th report in *The Times* and learning its basis—wishing Sir Gordon well—I have only just picked up a copy of it. However, I shall not join in the general euphoria—forgive me—because I believe that the public are entitled to know about those matters. I am grateful to hon. Members who are giving me a fair hearing.

The essence of my argument—of why I believe that Sir Gordon Downey has failed—is that he has failed to discharge his responsibility to uphold the integrity of the House by requiring those who make baseless allegations to be brought to book. That is where he has failed, and that is why I wish to say to his successor that I hope that she will not make the same mistake.

I believe that Sir Gordon Downey also does not deserve the eulogies of the House because of the way in which he dealt with a case in which I have declared a close interest. I have argued why. I am not simply asserting that Sir Gordon Downey is a bad chap; I am giving chapter and verse as to why I do not believe that the House should give the bloke a happy send-off. One of my reasons is that he chose to rely on the evidence of people who were totally and completely committed to a known crook and liar, in the words of the Department of Trade and Industry report. He failed to take into account the evidence of Mr. Christoph Betterman, a former vice-chairman of Harrods, who ended up banged up in a gaol in the middle east for nine months in squalid conditions. In evidence to Sir Gordon Downey, he said:

"In my bitter personal experience, Mr. Al-Fayed is a compulsive liar who will stop at nothing to achieve his objectives. Any statement of his and of his close employees seeking to corroborate him should be treated with the greatest circumspection."

Let me ask the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, who is a member of the Committee, why he did not require Sir Gordon Downey to invite Mr. Betterman to give evidence. Sir Gordon failed in his duty. He invited only those who would support the case for the prosecution, as it were.

We have now seen exhibited to public view the activities of Mr. Al Fayed in raiding the safe deposit box belonging to Tiny Rowland. He has now pulled out of the case, which cost £2.5 million and has now ended. It is further evidence that he and his colleagues have been crooks.

My basic point is that Sir Gordon Downey failed to discharge his responsibility.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): The hon. Gentleman condemns the work of Sir Gordon Downey, but surely he should respect the decision of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges to find Mr. Neil Hamilton guilty on seven out of the eight charges brought against him. I believe that the fact that Mr. Hamilton admitted to those seven charges would have resulted in his suspension from the House. Does the hon. Gentleman not respect the decision of the elected Members on the Select Committee?

Mr. Howarth: I am afraid that I do not, because the whole issue has been imbued with enormous partisan advantage, and I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. The evidence is in paragraph 814 of the report. The Prime Minister himself has been hauled before the Select Committee on three occasions and been accused—and found guilty—of minor transgressions which ought properly to have been recorded; yet Sir Gordon Downey asserts that the fact that Neil Hamilton was found guilty on a number of counts puts him completely beyond the pale. I am sorry, but I cannot find the exact quotation.

Sir Gordon Downey does not deserve the approbation of the House because he was partial. He took a more lenient and favourable towards some Members than towards others.

I am not alone in that view. On 20 October, *The Daily Telegraph*—a newspaper of repute and undoubted independence of mind, a fearless fighter for worthy causes—[HON. MEMBERS: "They are not here."] No; but they will be watching on the box, and I did not vote to bring television into the House.

On 20 October, *The Daily Telegraph* said:

"Under pressure to show that the new system of parliamentary regulation could handle corruption, Sir Gordon appears to have jumped to conclusions. Had he conducted a thorough investigation,

he would have realised that allegations made by employees under Mr. Fayed's direct control were highly suspect. The reason is obvious. Mr. Fayed carries out dirty tricks campaigns against staff who cross him. In the specific case of Alison Bozek, her claims are categorically denied by former members of Mr. Fayed's operations."

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Aldershot gives way, I have something to say. The hon. Gentleman has made his point about Sir Gordon Downey and has said that he does not wish to join his hon. Friends in congratulating him. He has a perfect right to do that. He has put the case as to why he should not congratulate Sir Gordon Downey, but the House should not have to listen to every piece of evidence. The hon. Gentleman has made his point and I hope that he will not give us chapter and verse of what Mr. Al Fayed or anyone else has done. The hon. Gentleman has made the point that he does not like Sir Gordon Downey.

Mr. Hoyle: Will the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) consider withdrawing his remarks? He has cast aspersions on certain right hon. and hon. Members by saying that the Select Committee treated some hon. Members more favourably than others. That raises questions about the right hon. and hon. Members on that Committee, and I think that he should withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Howarth: I am sorry, but I cannot withdraw what I said, as I believe it to be the case. The hon. Gentleman has not been in the House for very long. He and I worked together on aerospace matters and I respect him, but I do not believe—

Mr. Hoyle: Name the hon. Members.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman asks me to name the hon. Members involved. I have named the Prime Minister, whom I believe to have been treated more favourably and more leniently. I also believe that the Select Committee treated the Paymaster General more leniently than he warrants. Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends feel very strongly about that.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, let me say to the hon. Member for Aldershot that it is time that he concluded his remarks. The House has heard his case and knows exactly where he is coming from. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Gentleman is listening, because, if he intends indulging in personal criticism of any right hon. or hon. Member, he must table a motion and put it before the House.

Mr. Howarth: I accept your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mentioned to the Paymaster General—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not good enough for the hon. Gentleman to mention something to any right hon. or hon. Gentleman. If he is going to make personal criticisms of right hon. or hon. Gentlemen, he must put a motion before the House.

Mr. Howarth: Let me remind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that an hon. Member lost his seat because of false allegations that were made against him. They are serious charges. You invited me not to adduce an extensive range of evidence. I hope that I have introduced to the House sufficient evidence to support my claims. I invite Labour Members to be fair-minded and to imagine how they would feel if they were the victims of persecution.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Mitchell *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I remind the House that Mr. Hamilton was the Minister for Corporate Affairs who refused to do Al Fayed's bidding. It was crystal clear that the man had a motive and that is another reason why I feel Sir Gordon Downey has failed.

The purpose of my raising the issue is not to rake over old coals, but to ensure that the new commissioner, if her appointment is endorsed by the House tonight, is aware that there is not a one-sided view of the issue in the House and that there are serious matters to which she has to turn her mind. In order to uphold the integrity of the House, I invite her to look carefully at the way in which she discharges her responsibility. I have not met the lady and I have no idea about her. Like other right hon. and hon. Members, except those on the House of Commons Commission, I have to rely on their judgment. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) has had the benefit of considering the candidates. I have not. I have not been able to put my points and encourage the candidates to consider the nature of their responsibilities.

Mr. Mitchell *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I shall give way one last time, because I know that you want to move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) is raking over the coals of the case by attacking Sir Gordon Downey, but the problem about which he is complaining is the office of the independent commissioner for standards. If we have such an office—and we should—it is bound to work in the way in which Sir Gordon Downey worked.

The hon. Gentleman should cast his mind back to what would have happened with such accusations before we had the independent commissioner. The issue would have been dealt with entirely by a Committee of the House. There would have been accusations of chaps judging chaps and there would have been little faith outside in any verdict, for or against Neil Hamilton, because people would have said that we were being judge and jury in our own case. The issue would have been worse and more muddied. Why does the hon. Gentleman not compare what happened with what would have happened before?

Mr. Howarth: I believe that such matters should be dealt with by Members of Parliament. I do not believe that we should appoint outside people to judge them. The experience of Sir Gordon Downey proves the point to my satisfaction. I accept that it does not prove it to the satisfaction of other hon. Members. The guy is accountable, for goodness sake. Is he supposed to be

untouchable? Can we not criticise him or say anything about him? Of course we can say something about him. If we appointed him, we can jolly well hold him to account. That is all that I am trying to do.

I do not wish to strain your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have been very gracious towards me, and I appreciate that. I know that you know how I feel about the matter. I have not been raking over the coals. New evidence has appeared in the book by Mr. Tom Bower and in the excellent book called "Trial by Conspiracy" by Jonathan Boyd Hunt, a copy of which I shall let the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) have, for an appropriate fee—he insisted that he wanted to pay for it and did not want it for free. It is subtitled "The Lies, Cover-ups and Injustices Behind the Neil Hamilton Affair".

I shall ensure that Ms Filkin has a copy of the book, because I should like her to read it before she embarks on her job. It sets out what I believe to have been the gravest miscarriage of justice. I accept that it happened to a friend of mine, but I make no apologies for that—why should I? The House should recognise that it has been guilty of not having satisfactorily resolved a matter pertaining to one of its own. This is unfinished business. I hope that the new commissioner will look at the issue again and will take into account the matters that I have tried to put before the House.

7.42 pm

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I profoundly disagree with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). It is appropriate to dwell on the report and some of Sir Gordon Downey's parting shots to mark his retirement. It would have been dreadful, not least because of the entertainment that we have just had, if we had simply nodded the motion through.

I am a relatively new Member of Parliament and I bow to most others in experience, but I am a keen watcher of politics. I note in passing that until the last election, in Mr. Julian Critchley, Aldershot was represented by someone with a good deal more dignity than the current incumbent.

It is right that the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) was able to have his say in the context of welcoming Ms Filkin and marking the retirement of Sir Gordon Downey, however much others of us may disagree with what he said. The pound sign on the hon. Gentleman's lapel has just been drawn to my attention. I do not know whether it represents a subliminal signal of solidarity with Neil Hamilton, but I shall let that pass.

Mr. Gerald Howarth *rose—*

Mr. McNulty: The hon. Gentleman is about to tell me that the lapel badge is about saving the pound.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman was right the second time—and I think that he knew it at the outset. Of course it is to do with saving the pound.

Mr. McNulty: It may still be subliminal.

If ever there was evidence of the need for Sir Gordon Downey and his good works and the appointment of Elizabeth Filkin, it is what we have just heard. That eloquent, if petulant and ungracious, soliloquy from the apologia for the Neil Hamilton club shows far more clearly than anything that I could say that Sir Gordon Downey and his successor are sorely needed. To revisit an event at the general election, what we have just heard takes the biscuit in all sorts of ways and is entirely wrong. I wish Ms Filkin good luck. Given what we have just heard, she will need all her experience in looking after errant charges and children. The distortions that we have just heard on the clear evidence against Neil Hamilton that Sir Gordon Downey refers to were a travesty.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) has a right to his say. He has united most hon. Members behind a complete exoneration of and welcome for everything that Sir Gordon Downey has done. If Sir Gordon and Ms Filkin needed an enemy in the House, they could find no less a man than the hon. Gentleman.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I know precious little about Ms Elizabeth Filkin. I fully accept what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and other members of the Committee have said about her expertise and experience and I am sure that she is a more than appropriate successor to Sir Gordon Downey, but it might have been useful if we had had a detailed CV, perhaps in the Vote Office, for us to peruse, purely for information.

Sir Gordon Downey rightly did not mention it, but the issue of resources may need to be investigated. Some key points in the report are worth noting, not least the point on page vi about penalties. There is a real concern about the level, extent and manner of penalties imposed. I draw particular attention to the last paragraph of that page, which talks about the present range of penalties. Sir Gordon Downey says that they are adequate and appropriate, but a broader range could be employed by the Committee, beyond public censure, required apology, suspension and expulsion. Sir Gordon says in his retirement note that public opinion may feel that the Committee is a bit soft. We have moved from a zero base with no sanctions all the way to public apologies, public censure, suspension and expulsion, which crudely brings to mind being publicly executed for shoplifting. There must be a range of sanctions and penalties.

Sir Gordon's points about the lack of collective memory are also well made. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Committee or the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire will let me know afterwards whether there is to be serious training and reflection for future members of the Committee. They may need more than just half a morning from time to time.

I am not entirely sure that there should be any limitations, save perhaps for death. Seven years may be enough, except for issues of a particularly serious nature, as Sir Gordon Downey says, but there may be more to it. Seven years may be appropriate, but I am not sure.

It is worth dwelling on the report. The whole House should join the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire in wishing Ms Filkin well in her job and the best of luck. Given the drivel that we have heard from the hon. Member for Aldershot, she will clearly need it.

7.49 pm

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): It had not been my intention to say anything in this debate, but it is hard to remain silent following the remarks by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who has every right to stand by his friend—and I applaud him for that. One can have

[Mr. Martin Bell]

doubts about the way in which the House dealt with my predecessor in matters of the appeal procedure, as I have. None the less, I have been a Member—I became one rather by accident—for a little more than 18 months, and I found the hon. Gentleman's remarks the saddest and most melancholic and graceless that I have heard. To turn against him a word that he used, I would even say that his remarks were disgraceful. They were very sad to listen to.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman found my remarks graceless. If Mr. Neil Hamilton is successful in his libel action against Mohammed Al Fayed, the hon. Gentleman will have fought a baseless campaign.

Mr. Bell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I will be very surprised if the people who made the difference in this matter—the electors of Tatton—are proved wrong.

I turn to the remarks by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), whom I regard as my friend, although I am not of his party or any other. I thoroughly endorse his remarks about Sir Gordon Downey—a remarkable public servant. People in public service who are not elected representatives normally do not expect to be exposed to the vilification to which he has been subjected in the past two years. He has dealt with it with enormous calmness and dignity, and the House and the nation owe him a debt of gratitude. To draw on my previous occupation, Sir Gordon Downey has shown a particular quality which one normally finds only in soldiers in difficult situations: courage under fire.

7.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kate Hoey): I want to use this opportunity, on behalf of the Leader of the House, who, unfortunately is not able to be present but has sent her apologies, to put on record the Government's support for and tribute to the work of Sir Gordon Downey. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have spoken of his record. I pay tribute to him, particularly for the way in which he has performed the duties of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. He has been a most effective first occupant of the post. He has handled the setting up of the new arrangements for standards and privileges with great skill. He also had to handle some very difficult cases at the end of the previous Parliament. He set a high standard of service to the House, and has ensured that the office of parliamentary commissioner is highly respected. In doing so, he has helped to restore the reputation of the House. We wish him well.

We also welcome and support the House of Commons Commission's recommendation on the appointment of Elizabeth Filkin. Her recent role as the adjudicator for the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Department of Social Security Contributions Agency will ensure that she brings to the post a wealth of experience and a reputation for independence and integrity. We wish her well. We know that she will receive the full support of the House in her very important role, and we fully support the recommendation to appoint her.

7.53 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): There has been a range of contributions to this debate; I shall make a fairly limited speech.

The vast majority of the public do not know who Sir Gordon Downey is. There is no particular reason why they should. Although the post is a public appointment, the office-holder is not constantly on the radio or the television. Sir Gordon was almost invariably asked to discover whether there was evidence behind a complaint, and if there were, to consider the facts and put them to the Standards and Privileges Committee, of which the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) is the distinguished Chairman—not just as a result of his background but because he manages to get the Committee's members to agree. I endorse what he said in private that, if the Committee agrees unanimously, it carries far more weight.

One case fell out of the ordinary—the one considered in the eighth report. Paragraph 10 spells out clearly that the Speaker asked for something to happen that did not follow the usual way forward. Although I do not want to go further into events that may be considered in other places, it is worth noting that those who read the eighth report carefully will have an understanding of what happened and of the responsibilities of the commissioner and the Committee. In the appendix to the 19th report—the commissioner's valedictory report, if I may put it that way—people can see the range of disposals of complaints. Some were upheld, and some were not.

I have known Elizabeth Filkin in the past. She has been well chosen by the Commission. We should thank members of the Commission for their work. The Standards and Privileges Committee has thanked Sir Gordon Downey—not at great length, because the paragraph that thanks him does so properly and well. I hope that, in time, when we consider a successor to Elizabeth Filkin, the Committee will have earned as much respect as the commissioner. I hope that the House will have done so, too.

Anyone who believes that there are hon. Members who behave as badly as those in the past does not understand. According to the Cross-Bencher articles in the decade after the war, Members of Parliament engaged in a range of activities which make even the worst of us look pretty good. I take comfort from the fact that members of the public consider the standards of their own Member of Parliament to be high. Members of Parliament as a whole are considered not to be as good as we might be—although it is worth noting that we are generally considered to be better than Ministers as a whole. That may be the wrong way around; it is just the way that the public see it.

Let us stick to our responsibilities. I join those who congratulate Sir Gordon, who, when the Committee did not accept everything that he proposed, did not object. Let us remember that any recommendations made by the Committee were ours and not the commissioner's. Let us hope that, in future, the partnership between the people, Parliament, the Committee and the commissioner is as good as it has been recently.

7.56 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful to hon. Members for their speeches. The only complaint that I would make about the remarks of the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who is an old friend, is that he chose an inappropriate occasion on which to make them. Of course he is entitled to the views that he expressed; he has expressed them before. On reflection, he may consider that a substantive motion would have been a much better way in which to bring such important matters before the House.

The hon. Member for Aldershot is entitled, too, to his view of Sir Gordon Downey. Speaking on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, I certainly disagree with him. We should bear in mind the fact that Sir Gordon Downey took up the post of commissioner in the middle of a Parliament, when the new process was in gestation. It fell to him to adjudicate, in the light of common sense and reason, on many questions of interpretation posed by hon. Members. He discharged his task with great dignity. In co-operation with the Clerk of the Standards and Privileges Committee, he was able to include a corpus of detailed guidance in the code of conduct and the guide to the rules on which the House now relies. More than anything else, that is his legacy. Of course the process will evolve; of course there are lessons to be learned; of course there will be pressures on the individuals whom we appoint commissioners. The role that Sir Gordon established, which set standards for the future, will serve the House well in years to come.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman address the important issue that I raised? If somebody makes false allegations against an hon. or right hon. Member, should that person be brought before the House to apologise and brought to book? Does the hon. Gentleman think that it is just a one-way street?

Mr. Kirkwood: Some of the facts and circumstances as related by the hon. Gentleman seem to me to show his misunderstanding of the position, because he is, indirectly or directly, criticising not the parliamentary commissioner, but the Committee itself. He is entitled to do so, but I should have thought that the appropriate way of doing so would be to table a substantive motion, which could then be amended and debated in the House in the proper way. He is investing the post with a degree of authority that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards retiring and the prospective Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards do not have.

Let me direct the hon. Gentleman's attention to the annexe to the report that we are debating. The final point in the section detailing the job description states clearly that the principal duties are, inter alia,

"Receiving and investigating complaints about the conduct of Members (whether related directly to alleged breaches of the Code or not) and reporting her findings to the Committee."

Surely, that is the point. Any substantive complaints about past events should be directed at members of the Committee. That is right and proper.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) has raised an important issue. I hope that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) agrees that it is right to put it on the record that, in any future complaint, the complainant will be expected to carry the burden of providing evidence so that the commissioner will know whether there is something worth investigating. If the commissioner were satisfied that there was prima facie evidence that justified an investigation, I suspect that people who gave false evidence would find themselves in trouble, but those who gave evidence that did not fully substantiate the case would not necessarily face any penalty.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am only a humble member of the House of Commons Commission, but those points cover territory that should be considered by the Committee itself. I am sure that the new commissioner will closely examine our debate, which will be a positive step. I am happy to take back the points raised and ensure that the new commissioner gives them some thought, albeit in conjunction with the Clerks and the members of the Committee, because they are the people who will consider and develop our future procedures.

I can put my hand on my heart and give a cast-iron assurance to hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), who was, quite rightly, concerned that the Commission should in future take the time to set out more details about a prospective candidate before the report came to the House for a final decision. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that a comprehensive and detailed board was set up in accordance with all the civil service equal opportunities provisions. There were 19 applications, reduced to a shortlist of five, consisting of three men and two women. The process of deliberation was exhaustive and resulted in two excellent final candidates. Others have not had the advantage of being able to cross-examine Elizabeth Filkin, but having had the benefit of doing so, I have no hesitation in saying that she is an appropriate person for the job.

The debate has been useful, albeit slightly tense at times. We on the Commission will certainly reflect on the substantive points raised. I hope that other hon. Members, including those who have spoken, will also reflect. To return to the main business, I urge the House to endorse the recommendation that the report contains.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That Ms Elizabeth Filkin be appointed Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on the retirement of Sir Gordon Downey, KCB, on the terms of the Report of the House of Commons Commission (HC 1143), dated 9th November 1998.

Prisoners (Northern Ireland)

8.3 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Specified Organisations) (No. 2) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

Under the Good Friday agreement, both Governments promised to put in place an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners. That part of the agreement has caused deep heart searching for many, including those who have to implement it. For many of the victims of horrendous crimes over the years, it has renewed the pains and hurts that they still bear. The Government are working with them to address their needs and we shall continue to look at ways in which we can support and help the all too many victims of the past 30 years and their families.

However, despite the pain and the doubts, the issue of releases was and remains an integral part of the agreement, which was adopted by the participants, endorsed by the people and implemented by this Parliament in the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. In the agreement, a clear condition was attached to the release of prisoners in paragraph 2, page 25, which states:

"Prisoners affiliated to organisations which have not established or are not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire will not benefit from the arrangements. The situation in this regard will be kept under review."

The Act passed by the House on 28 July reflects that condition in full. It also reflects the four factors that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in the course of the referendum campaign, said would be taken into account in reaching an overall judgment on whether an organisation could benefit.

The agreement clearly linked the release of prisoners to the maintenance of a complete and unequivocal ceasefire. It is not for us to overturn the agreement and add new conditions or make new linkages. If we did so, what authority would we have to insist that others should also hold to their commitments without adding new conditions?

The draft order recognises that the Loyalist Volunteer Force has declared a complete and unequivocal ceasefire. The effect of the draft order is that the LVF will be removed from the list of specified organisations. Therefore, individuals affiliated to it will be eligible for the benefit of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. That benefit is the early release of prisoners convicted of scheduled offences committed before 10 April 1998, the date of the Good Friday agreement.

If an organisation is specified, members of that organisation do not qualify for early release. The draft order shows that the organisations that remain specified are the Continuity IRA, the Irish National Liberation Army and the Real IRA. The draft order is the result of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State keeping the security situation and relevant organisations under continual review. That review of our earlier judgment of the organisations to be specified has taken account of the ceasefires called by the LVF, the INLA and, more recently, the Real IRA.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to explain something that increasingly mystifies and disturbs many people, principally those on the mainland. How is it that the prisoner release process is proceeding apace, when nothing whatsoever appears to have happened regarding decommissioning of arms, explosives and other weapons? Can the Minister explain to frustrated voters on the mainland why that is happening, when earlier so much stress was laid on the fact that the two had to be intimately connected?

Mr. Ingram: Conservative Members could help to spread understanding of the Good Friday agreement. The agreement was not about that linkage, although aspects of the agreement related to decommissioning. I was going to refer to the totality of the agreement later in my speech, and I hope that that will provide an explanation. I call on everyone who has an understanding of the agreement not to create new parameters, or to try to define new dimensions or establish new preconditions; if they do so, they are no longer supporters of the Good Friday agreement, which the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland and in the Republic supported in overwhelming numbers. That is not to say that the issue has not been addressed: it is being addressed. Every Member of Parliament wants full decommissioning to happen.

I was saying that the review of our earlier judgment of the organisations to be specified had to take into account the ceasefires called by the LVF, the INLA and the Real IRA. Although our current conclusion is that no additional organisations should be specified, the situation will remain under review.

Let me deal with the organisations that are now specified in the order. The Continuity IRA has not declared a ceasefire and will, therefore, remain specified. The Real IRA announced a ceasefire on 7 September—a most welcome development. The worth of that ceasefire will have to be proved in word and deed over a longer period. I do not need to remind the House that this was the organisation responsible for the horrific events at Omagh which resulted in 29 deaths and many hundreds of others injured and traumatised. The Government are far from convinced that its ceasefire represents a genuine and lasting commitment to exclusively peaceful means.

The INLA also remains specified, since we are not yet persuaded that its ceasefire is complete and unequivocal. Its ceasefire was called on 22 August and, like the Real IRA, it still needs to demonstrate by word and deed its commitment now and in the future to exclusively peaceful and democratic means to pursue its objectives.

The Government will pursue those responsible for past terrorist crimes, and bring the full weight of the law to bear against those who continue to plan and perpetrate such evil acts.

Let me now refer to the Loyalist Volunteer Force. The Secretary of State is now satisfied that this organisation has established a complete and unequivocal ceasefire, and has done so over a significant period. Since May this year, the LVF has demonstrated that its ceasefire is being maintained. The decision that it should no longer be specified also recognises the significant contacts that the LVF has made, via an intermediary, with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning.

The decision also takes into account the LVF's public commitment to make a start to decommissioning within a short period of its ceasefire being recognised.

Although other organisations have maintained their ceasefires for longer, no other organisation has committed itself to a start to decommissioning. We welcome the LVF's commitment. We look forward to it being honoured.

All the participants in the negotiations committed themselves to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. Paragraph 3 of page 20 of the Good Friday agreement says:

"All participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission, and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement."

In common with all commitments in the agreement, we look for tangible evidence that that commitment also is being implemented. The Government are living up to our commitments under the agreement; we expect everyone else to do so as well.

As I have said, all of those issues are kept under continuous review, taking into account all the evidence available on the best security advice, and taking into account all the factors prescribed in the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 and the Good Friday agreement itself. We are working to ensure that, as the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland have indicated, there is no future for violence—it must be consigned to the past.

The future is in peace, in following the democratic path and in acknowledging other people's rights as one would expect them to acknowledge one's own. Arguments can and should be settled through discussion, consensus and the rule of law, and not through perpetual distrust and recourse to arbitrary and brutal violence. The Government are committed to seeing this process through, facing up to all the difficulties and, importantly, looking for resolutions to them. The way forward is through the implementation of the Good Friday agreement in all its parts. The order is part of this process. I commend it to the House.

8.13 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): First, I believe that the Secretary of State's timing is about right in reviewing her earlier judgments on specifying—or unspecifying, as the case may be—the various terrorist organisations. I welcome the fact that the Minister has come to the House with the order. I will not second-guess the security advice that the Secretary of State and the Minister have been given. I trust that advice and, therefore, the Opposition will not oppose—indeed, we will support—the order in any Division tonight.

Having said that, it is worth while reflecting that the Loyalist Volunteer Force has been one of the most evil, sectarian and psychopathic organisations that this country has had the misfortune to experience. Nothing that we do tonight by voting for the order in any way diminishes the evil of what has taken place.

I have noted carefully that, over the past few months since its ceasefire began, the LVF has promised that, once it has been unspecified by the Secretary of State, it will immediately start decommissioning all its illegally held arms and explosives. I hope that the LVF sticks to its word—it is vital that it does. It will be a useful nudge to those who have been extremely dilatory and have been dragging their feet by not decommissioning in any shape or form, even though they have signed up to the Good Friday agreement.

I wish to take issue, gently, with the Minister, who gave the impression to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) that there was no link between decommissioning and the early release of terrorist prisoners. On 20 April in the House, the Secretary of State said:

"I am sure that he and his colleagues understand that, according to the nature of the agreement, several things must happen in parallel in order to build confidence. That has always been the situation, whether it be decommissioning, the release of prisoners".—[*Official Report*, 20 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 484.]

I agreed with the Secretary of State then. I fear that many will feel let down that that has not happened.

On 6 May, in reply to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister said:

"Yes. As the right hon. Gentleman rightly says, it is important to emphasise that people must sign up to the whole agreement and not to bits and pieces of it. The whole agreement stands as a package, and everyone who says yes to it is saying yes to all the agreement. They cannot say yes to the bits they like and leave aside the bits that they do not like; they must sign up to the agreement in its entirety."

Clearly, the paramilitaries have not done that, as shown by the lack of decommissioning.

Later—again in answer to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—the Prime Minister said:

"Again, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is essential that organisations that want to benefit from the early release of prisoners should give up violence. Decommissioning is part of that, of course".—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1998; Vol. 311, c. 711.]

That has not happened.

During the referendum campaign—when we rightly campaigned for a yes vote in the Province—the Prime Minister, at the Balmoral showgrounds, said on 14 May:

"The Agreement is what has to be implemented, in all its parts. In clarifying whether the terms and spirit of the Agreement are being met and whether violence has genuinely been given up for good, there are a range of factors to take into account . . . progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively directing and promoting violence; full co-operation with the Independent Commission on decommissioning to implement the provisions of the Agreement".

Again, the people of Northern Ireland have a right to feel let down, because there has not been that co-operation. Although 204 terrorist prisoners have been released early by the Government, there has been no sign of any decommissioning of illegally held weapons—not one gun, not one ounce of Semtex.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, when the previous Government were in power, early prisoner releases were taking place, yet there were no unequivocal ceasefires?

Mr. MacKay: There was a change in the rules to release prisoners, and the hon. Lady is correct. I am not saying that there should be no release of prisoners. That was in the Good Friday agreement, as the Minister of State has rightly pointed out. The Government have shown their good faith to the paramilitaries by releasing prisoners early. I object to the fact that they have continued to release prisoners—204 terrorist prisoners

[Mr. MacKay]

have now been released early—even though there has been no sign of decommissioning of illegally held weapons. I have said on a number of occasions that the Prime Minister should have drawn a line in the sand and said that no more terrorist prisoners would be released early until there was substantial and verifiable decommissioning.

Reasonable people on the mainland and in the Province cannot understand why there is continuing early release of terrorist prisoners when there is no sign of decommissioning. As the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) might recall, I put that to the Secretary of State at the most recent Northern Ireland Question Time on 28 October. She replied:

"I have made clear to the right hon. Gentleman on other occasions the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I shall repeat them. He said that decommissioning is crucial, that it is a central part of the agreement and that we want all dimensions to move in parallel. If there is no progress, we will review it."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1998; Vol. 318, c. 322.]

Clearly, the dimensions are not moving in parallel. The Good Friday agreement is now seven months old, and if there is no decommissioning, but there are prisoner releases, the dimensions are not running in parallel as the Secretary of State and I rightly believe they should. I therefore suggest that a review of the situation is long overdue. The right hon. Lady willingly admitted to me that it should be reviewed.

I warn the Minister of State, in the gentlest way, that the agreement made in Belfast on Good Friday, which he and I strongly support, will be in jeopardy if there is continuing early terrorist release without substantial and viable decommissioning, not to mention the problems that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the First Minister in the Assembly, has in appointing Ministers to the Executive. The right hon. Gentleman has correctly said that he is not prepared to appoint Sinn Fein Ministers until there is substantial and verifiable decommissioning. I hope that the Minister agrees that no politician can hold ministerial office, with all the responsibilities that that entails, while his paramilitary associates retain their guns and explosives.

The House must remember that the IRA and Sinn Fein are one and the same.

Mr. Ingram *indicated assent.*

Mr. MacKay: The Minister nods vigorously. I am always pleased to hear the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State say that the IRA and Sinn Fein are inextricably linked. There is, therefore, absolutely no doubt in my mind that, if Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness were in favour of decommissioning, there would be no problem in achieving it. They have seen a substantial number of their terrorist friends released from prison early without any decommissioning taking place, so they have said, "It does not look as though there is any need for decommissioning. We can have what we want from the bargain. We can cherry-pick and have our prisoners released and retain all our arms and explosives."

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State will have to say to all the paramilitaries, whether they are so-called loyalist or republican, "You will not have one more terrorist prisoner released early under the agreement unless you comply with the rest of the agreement and start substantially to decommission." It is not good enough for Mr. McGuinness to say, as he did in an interview on the same radio station as me last week, "Well, we have two years to do it." Any reasonable person would say that, seven months on, if there is absolutely no sign of decommissioning, that is not satisfactory.

Conservative Members are not saying that every gun and every ounce of Semtex should already have been handed in or handed in before any prisoners were released. We are certainly not saying that any of the terrorist organisations must publicly hand in their weapons. All we want is for decommissioning to be verifiable by the decommissioning commission because we, like the Minister, have full faith in General de Chastelain. The method is secondary to the process taking place.

Mr. Ingram: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the assessment of the Secretary of State and of me that the Provisional IRA is currently engaged in an unequivocal ceasefire? It is, therefore, a beneficiary under the Act and should remain so because that is the basis on which the Act was passed by the House in response to the Good Friday agreement.

Mr. MacKay: An unequivocal ceasefire, as the Prime Minister said at the Dispatch Box on 6 May in response to the Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), has to include decommissioning. I warmly welcome, as does the Minister, the fact that there has been a cessation of violence, but it is not an unequivocal cessation. He and I cannot sit comfortably until all the paramilitaries, not just the Provisional IRA, fully comply with the conditions that they signed up to in Belfast on Good Friday, and they are clearly not doing so. Let us be blunt—there is absolutely no decommissioning going on.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We speak of an unequivocal ceasefire, but weapons have been used by terrorists. That is a sham when it is claimed not by the IRA or UVF, but by others. However, is it not more significant that the spokespersons representing the UVF and the IRA, who sit with the general on the decommissioning commission, have said publicly that they will not decommission?

Mr. MacKay: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I know that the Minister has said publicly that the remarks of Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness that the Provisional IRA will not decommission were deeply regrettable. I hope that they will think again, but I fear that they will do so only if they are told by the Prime Minister that no more of their terrorist friends will be released early from prison.

To take up another point made by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), although it strays slightly wide of the order, none of us can be comfortable with the punishment beatings and intimidation that continue, and while they continue, there is no complete and unequivocal renunciation of violence. On balance, that is not serious enough for us to respecify organisations, but I hope that the Minister and the Secretary of State will make it clear that if punishment beatings continue, the organisations proved to be involved

will lose their status under the order. That is a wicked and evil form of violence, which the Minister and I know intimidates some of the weakest and most vulnerable members of the community in the Province.

Mr. Ingram: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that, as I said in my opening remarks, all the elements on which any paramilitary or terrorist organisation is judged are continually kept under review, and we act on the basis of the best security advice available. The Secretary of State has made it clear that she will not hesitate to exercise her judgment correctly and proportionately on any breach of those conditions.

Mr. MacKay: I am, as usual, grateful to the Minister of State. It is important that, when we are debating this sensitive issue in the House, we never let those who are the victims of so-called punishment beatings and intimidation, who are often those in the poorest areas of the Province, feel that they have been forgotten or that they are vaguely expendable in the greater political process in which the Minister and I are engaged. It is vital that the House sends a clear message; I am extremely grateful to the Minister for doing so.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, last month, he and I met representatives of a newly formed group, Families Acting for Innocent Relatives, and does he recall the deep sense of injustice felt by those representatives of the Protestant community of south Armagh in particular, about early release without decommissioning?

Mr. MacKay: I most certainly do remember the occasion. I have been in correspondence since, and I am due to meet representatives of Families Acting for Innocent Relatives. The families concerned, especially those that live in and near south Armagh, have a genuine grievance. Substantial terrorist activity is continuing. Innocent people on both sides of the sectarian divide are being intimidated, and are very scared. I am sure that the Minister is well aware of that and that, like me, he would like that to be stopped as soon as possible. I hope quite soon to visit south Armagh to see for myself at first hand what that organisation of very brave people has to show me. I very much concur with my hon. Friend.

Tonight the House must give the following clear message. Yes, we pass the order unspecifying the LVF, but we insist that the LVF decommissions as it promised and declare that, if it does not do so, the matter will be reviewed again; moreover, we shall stop releasing terrorist prisoners early until we have substantial and verifiable decommissioning on behalf of all paramilitaries, whatever side of the sectarian divide they come from.

8.31 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): The right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) knows that I share his profound revulsion at the murderous psychotic members of the LVF, and others like them. I am sure that all hon. Members share that revulsion. I have said often enough in this place that we live in a mature parliamentary democracy, and that the activities of such psychotic people are those of the mobster—of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s.

I believe that the right hon. Member for Bracknell acts in good faith when he offers legitimate criticisms of the utter lack of progress on the almost insoluble issue of decommissioning. However, I believe that the Minister has acted with good sense and courage in relation to the order—it is a curious way of putting it—in unspecifying those psychotic people. I sometimes wish that we could unspecify them out of our hair, but that may be too much to hope.

The hon. Members for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) know that I have often said—as did the right hon. Member for Bracknell earlier—that I detest the dreadful punishment beatings. They are the acts of gangsters, some of whom claim—absurdly and obscenely—to be engaged in a military campaign, either defending the Union or seeking its partial destruction where the north of Ireland is concerned.

I agree that the decommissioning issue was always going to be the most difficult problem to tackle in relation to north-south relations, east-west relations and other developments. I do not have the answers. I believe that, in the fulness of time, decommissioning will take place—that it will be brought about by the efforts of the Government and of all those actively involved in politics in Northern Ireland. General de Chastelain has an important role to play. His patient, painstaking work and that of his colleagues will help enormously in this matter, but I believe that it will be a slow process.

Like the right hon. Member for Bracknell, I should love to see what he called substantial and verifiable demonstrations of decommissioning. Yes, we all desire to see such gestures by those psychotic people. I should also like those members of the American Congress—some of whom I met in Washington—who appear to be fully paid-up members of Sinn Fein-IRA, to urge their friends, or "comrades", in Northern Ireland to act more constructively. I wish that, now that the peace process is in operation and the House is legislating for radical constitutional change in the United Kingdom, they would play a more constructive part vis-a-vis their friends in the north.

I believe that progress in decommissioning will be brought about to a large extent by what I have called the patient or painstaking work of General de Chastelain and his colleagues and others, but it will be a hard road to follow. Sinn Fein-IRA could do much more to help things along. Recently, we have heard some very disingenuous—to put it mildly—statements by Sinn Fein representatives. For the people of Northern Ireland—the men, women and children represented by the two Northern Ireland Members present, the hon. Members for Belfast, South and for Fermanagh and South Tyrone—let us have a substantial and verifiable form of decommissioning. However, as I said to the Minister, it was right and proper to bring the order to the House.

8.36 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): The issue of prisoner release is creating immense difficulties for those who are set the task of putting in place a devolved structure in Northern Ireland that can meet the expectations of society as a whole.

I agree with all that has been said about the LVF to the effect that its members are ruthless killers. Those are sectarian killers. They are not people for whom I or any of my colleagues have the slightest sympathy.

[Mr. Ken Maginnis]

I shall raise one small issue with the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), who has said that those in the LVF are the most ruthless and sectarian killers. For someone who has lived in Northern Ireland for the past almost 30 years of violence, there is no such thing as the most ruthless. Each terrorist organisation—

Mr. MacKay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maginnis: I shall not give way at this stage. I may be nit-picking—

Mr. MacKay: I said "some of the most ruthless" killers.

Mr. Maginnis: The right hon. Gentleman will perhaps allow me, at his expense, to make my point.

Each and every terrorist organisation—whether it be a terrorist organisation that has a political wing, that political wing having been involved in a talks process, or whether it be a terrorist organisation that is without a political wing—has displayed the utmost ruthlessness at some time during the past 28 years. One must look at what is being achieved by accepting the declaration of the LVF—an organisation with no political wing. The LVF obviously feels that it will not be taken seriously unless it makes an offer to Government—remember that self-interest is involved—regarding the release of prisoners. To secure their release, the organisation is prepared not only to declare an end to violence but to surrender its guns, disarm or decommission—whatever euphemism is most acceptable to it.

That creates a difference between the LVF and other organisations such as the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force. Those organisations have politically linked parties. There is much real linkage between the politicians—the Adamses and the McGuinnesses—and organisations such as the IRA. Others in other political parties are linked in the same way. One must now ask whether we have made good progress and whether the Government are as assiduous in seeking to make progress at this stage as they were in March and April this year. I believe that both our Government and the Irish Government are failing to show the enthusiasm for implementing the agreement that they demonstrated in achieving the agreement in March and April. That is a fundamental mistake.

We must remember that the LVF did not accept that agreement; it rejected it. That is why the organisation continued its violence after agreement was reached. We must not forget that fact because it may have repercussions: members of that organisation may be imprisoned for long periods as a result. We must wonder at what stage, having achieved its objective of getting prisoners released in return for decommissioning, we shall see the LVF resume violence—they are ruthless people—under that or some other convenient name, as part of a campaign to have others released.

The Minister shakes his head. I have been around for too long to trust any terrorist. I know how terrorists on both sides are willing to exploit what they perceive as weakness on the part of the Government—and that weakness has been displayed by both parties in government during my time in the House.

When taking stock, one must get over the notion that, because the LVF does not have a politically linked group, it is somehow worse than the UDA or the IRA. As the IRA, through Sinn Fein, is likely to be involved in the Executive—although certainly not immediately because it has not qualified—we should remember what Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams, in particular, stand for. Let me remind the House who Gerry Adams is. He is the person who, in 1983, said:

"The IRA does not need an electoral mandate for armed struggle. It derives its mandate from the presence of the British in the six counties."

In 1986, he said:

"For our part, this leadership has been active in the longest phase of resistance to the British presence. Our record speaks for itself . . . The tactic of armed struggle is of primary importance."

So we move down the years. In 1988, Gerry Adams said:

"Armed struggle is seen as a political option. Its use is considered in terms of achieving national political aims and the efficacy of other forms of struggle."

We move on to 1989. Gerry Adams complained:

"The British government rarely listens to the force of argument. It understands only the argument of force . . . Armed struggle, however, is not merely a defensive reaction by an oppressed people. It sets the political agenda. Thus armed struggle can advance the overall struggle to the advantage of those in whose interests it is waged . . . armed struggle is a necessary and morally correct form of resistance in the six counties."

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maginnis: I shall give way when I have completed these quotations. It is important to recognise that the thinking of IRA-Sinn Fein and its leader, Gerry Adams, has not changed down the years. In 1990, he said:

"We believe that Irish people have the right to use armed struggle in the context of seeking Irish independence and in the conditions of British occupation of the six counties."

In 1994, he said:

"The causes of conflict are still on-going".

That was at a time when he was considering calling a ceasefire. Therefore, we must put that ceasefire in context—if we need to do so after Canary Wharf. He continued:

"Every so often there will be a spectacular to remind the world."

Gerry Adams summed up his attitude to violence by saying:

"The tactic of armed struggle is of primary importance because it provides a vital cutting edge. Without it the issue of Ireland would not even have become an issue. So, in effect the armed struggle becomes armed propaganda."

We must look carefully at an organisation linked to a paramilitary force that has never repudiated or retracted that philosophy. When the Secretary of State said last week in her speech to the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies that the IRA had said that it had accepted a partitionist solution, she was indulging in a flight of fancy. The IRA—and hence its paramilitary linked party, Sinn Fein—has never accepted any such thing.

Mr. Winnick: As the hon. Gentleman quoted Mr. Adams, perhaps he would be interested to know that, in September 1983, at a meeting with Mr. Adams, I asked

him what mandate he had from the Irish people as a whole for the terrorism of the IRA. I also said that no British Government would ever surrender to the IRA against the wishes of the majority of people in Northern Ireland, and I was not proved wrong. The peace process demonstrates that terrorism will not bring about the kind of unitary state that Mr. Adams wants. It can be brought about only when the majority of people in Northern Ireland say that that is what they want.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is helpful and bears out much of what I believe. I am trying to impress on the House the fact that we are going through a process in which, whatever we achieve—I supported what was achieved on 10 April—cannot be implemented by only one party to the agreement, while the other party procrastinates.

I illustrate that by pointing out to right hon. and hon. Members that the issue of prisoner releases had to be addressed over a two-year period. No start date was specified for prisoner releases, yet the Government moved ahead at the earliest opportunity, and within five months of beginning, have released more than half the prisoners who may be eligible.

If that is the way in which the Government are prepared to implement the agreement, with all the risks attached, it cannot be improper for those of us who want disarmament and verification of that process to say, "No, there never was a specified starting date for disarmament, but in the agreement it was predicated on the same basis as prisoner releases." It had to be completed within two years of the date of the referendum, and it could not possibly happen in the last week, as Martin McGuinness suggests. It must be an on-going process.

Reassurance and confidence building are a two-way street. Many of us have accepted the advice of people such as Michael von Tangen Page of the department of peace studies at the university of Bradford, who pointed out that, in most civil conflicts, it is usually necessary to release prisoners in order to bring about a clean cut-off from terrorism as one moves towards democracy. That is what I read into what Michael von Tangen Page has written, which is cited in a research paper produced by the Library.

If I accept that, I must look to see whether there has been a clean cut-off between the violence and the new democratic process. That is what I voted for on 22 May and again on 25 June. I believe that it is what most of the 70-plus per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland voted for on those occasions. If Government—perhaps I should say if the parties to the agreement—do not meet their obligations in that respect, confidence will be undermined and it will become virtually impossible to make the political process work as we had hoped that it would.

My party leader asked the Prime Minister on 13 May whether he would

"make clear that those obligations"—

the obligations to disarm and so on—

"which are clearly set out in the agreement, will be made effective and reflected in forthcoming legislation?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"Yes—I intend to make it clear that the commitment and the obligations in the agreement must all be fulfilled and that no one can choose to fulfil some parts of the agreement and not others."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 365.]

We must build confidence at each and every opportunity that presents itself. That is why I welcome the decision to test the LVF, but I do not want that organisation tested softly. I want it tested in the most stringent manner.

Since 10 April, there have been two sides to the situation in Northern Ireland—not Protestant and Roman Catholic, and not nationalist and Unionist. The two sides now are the terrorists who have yet to cross the psychological hurdle of abandoning terrorism, with all that that implies, and the law-abiding citizenry of Northern Ireland, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. The Minister, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister must begin to reassure us that their enthusiasm for implementation, their attention to detail and their expectation in respect of all parties are as strong as was their desire for an agreement in the first place.

There are various indicators of the progress that has been made. Particularly in respect of Sinn Fein-IRA, which will be in the Executive of a devolved Government if it meets the criteria laid down, there are a number of indicators that must be examined carefully at this stage. We must ask ourselves why the entire energies of Sinn Fein-IRA are now directed exclusively against the Royal Ulster Constabulary, in every respect possible, down to intimidating a football team in West Belfast into refusing to take part in a football competition because the RUC was the team that it drew in the competition.

I have listened to members of the Roman Catholic tradition in Northern Ireland—people for whom I have the highest respect, such as Monsignor Denis Faul. I have heard them tell what it is really like, from the Catholic side of the community, to have to face up to the IRA's intimidation. I also hear exactly the same thing from people within my own tradition in respect of the UVF and the UDA. I always feel obliged to say that all organisations that indulge in terror are equally obnoxious to me.

The Government of the Irish Republic have been found wanting. I am particularly disappointed that Bertie Ahern, who I believed had the courage to move things forward, has been equivocal about those who sit in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

When it was announced that the LVF was to be brought aboard the scheme for prisoner releases because of its ceasefire and willingness to disarm, Bertie Ahern had no need to say, "But this does not mean anything as far as the IRA is concerned." How does Bertie Ahern, the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic, know that, unless that is the message that he has been getting? If that is the message that he has been getting from the IRA, he should be sharing that message with our Secretary of State and with our Prime Minister, and they should act immediately to bring an end to prisoner releases and the process that was intended to allow us all to move into a devolved democratic mode in Northern Ireland.

Those are the questions that I must ask. I do not have an answer to all the questions. When I put my hand up for the agreement on 10 April, I never believed that everything would be easy; that it would not take time; that there would not be fears and suspicions; that there would not be delaying processes—

Dr. Godman: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman closely. He may criticise the lack of enthusiasm shown by

[Dr. Godman]

Ministers here and by the Taoiseach and his Ministers, but he cannot deny that they are all utterly committed to progress in these matters. Surely commitment as well as enthusiasm is important.

Mr. Maginnis: Commitment is a wonderful thing, but in this case the energy to realise one's ambitions is more wonderful still.

The two Governments have the power and authority to insist—it is not within the power of my party to insist—that all meet their obligations as we advance what is now called the peace process.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has done everything in his power. He has been assiduous in putting into place every measure that can encourage even those who have been our enemies for the past 28 years.

I leave the House with this thought, which may help it to understand. Sinn Fein-IRA, through Adams and McGuinness, used to clamour to speak to a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office. That happened. Then they clamoured to speak to a member of the Cabinet—the Secretary of State. That happened. Then they clamoured to speak to the Prime Minister, and the day they walked out of No. 10 Downing street for the first time, they did not tell us what progress they were going to make. They did not tell us how they would remove the threat that they pose to society in Northern Ireland, and they did not even tell us what they had said to the Prime Minister. They said that they had to meet my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann. Hon. Members will remember that my right hon. Friend was persuaded, from both sides of the House, that he should concede that particular point, and he has done so. Again, he has seen no reward for his industry.

It is time for stocktaking. This is the first opportunity that we have had to consider the prisoner issue and other issues relevant to progress in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will give us some small suggestion of the time scale within which he hopes to stocktake in public and tell us where the Government are going in relation to the problems that we face.

9.5 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): In our judgment, the order is good news because it suggests that the process is working. If the Secretary of State has the evidence to make her confident that the Loyalist Volunteer Force should be removed from the specified list, that suggests that other organisations are leaving the path of violence and accepting that there is a more attractive, peaceful alternative.

As for the related issues that were mentioned by the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) and the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), it is clear that there is a relationship between prisoner release, decommissioning, specified organisations and the peace process. As the Minister has said, however, and it needs to be emphasised repeatedly, we cannot renegotiate the Good Friday agreement and, as a result, there are clear consequences for prisoner release in respect of that text, which must be honoured. I do not imagine that any hon. Member is suggesting otherwise. The issues relating to the Good Friday agreement are now accepted, implicitly at least, but the relationships between decommissioning and removing specified organisations from the list, and the prisoner releases that that entails, seem to be the biggest sticking point.

We must recognise the importance of flexibility in the process. If there had not been flexibility in the debate before the Good Friday agreement and thereafter, we would not be making such progress. One of the biggest difficulties in Northern Irish politics was the unwillingness of anyone to move an inch from often dogmatic positions, but we find ourselves in a much more fluid environment. It is a testimony to all sides in Northern Irish politics that the sometimes risky moves that have been made have led to the breakthroughs which appear to be consolidating the peace as it stands.

To that extent, notwithstanding the examples cited by the right hon. Member for Bracknell from the Prime Minister's quotations, we must recognise that flexibility remains a key consideration—a key concern—as we attempt to find a way forward on the sticking point of decommissioning.

Decommissioning will be a problem, although some people regard it as a merely symbolic issue. I regard it as more than that, and other hon. Members have said the same, but it is appropriate for us to keep our eye on the ball and on the big picture—the elimination of violence in Northern Ireland and its replacement with a peaceful alternative. To that extent, the flexibility that Ministers, as well as Northern Ireland politicians, have shown has led to a direct reward in terms of the progress that we have made.

What is more, apparently intransigent comments on both sides have sometimes led to surprising breakthroughs. Forty-eight hours before the Good Friday agreement was settled, one hon. Member said that the chance of a successful outcome was less than 5 per cent. I understand why he said that, but let us not fool ourselves: it is sometimes expedient for individuals to make strong statements in defence of their position, which could shift. On that occasion, it did so radically. I was so surprised by the odds and the result that I seriously thought about doing the lottery.

If we are realistic and honest with ourselves, similar breakthroughs could occur in respect of those who resist decommissioning. It has been a testimony to Northern Irish politicians that they have often not accepted that failure is an option in this process. The public in Northern Ireland have been clear that they want lasting peace. There have been acts of faith all down the line. The religious interpretation of an act of faith is believing in something that one cannot see. Perhaps nothing short of a political miracle is required before we can make progress on decommissioning, but breakthroughs have been made repeatedly in the past few years, beginning with the previous Administration's courageous efforts to kick the process off and continuing with the current Government's efforts and successes. Therefore I do not entirely share the concerns of the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. I am an optimist, based on the evidence so far.

A subject that has already been mentioned is punishment beatings. Although bombings and shootings seem to have declined massively as reported in the traditional sense on the "Nine O'clock News", and, in the case of many organisations, disappeared altogether, punishment beatings remain at a high level. Evidence

suggests that the occurrence of punishment beatings far exceeds the official police record. One need not be a genius to understand why many are not reported. The victims suffer appallingly and some have their lives threatened. Will the Minister assure the House and the public at large that the Government do not find the current level of punishment beatings in the Province acceptable? Will the Government tackle the problem directly with those who may have an influence, and indirectly through the security forces, as a short-term concern that must be headed off?

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone showed great insight into the relationship between the LVF and political bodies. To the best of my understanding, the LVF has no clear connection with a particular political group in Northern Ireland. He is right to point out that other dangers lie ahead. Some individuals who are intent on pursuing a course of violence may be tempted back to that bankrupt philosophy. I hope that the security forces and the Government will watch for the danger signs, because violence is bound to corrupt the peace process and we want no backward steps.

The order represents progress and I am pleased to support it. It is a credit to the generally sensible speeches that we hear in the House and a testament to the people and politicians in Northern Ireland who have shown great courage in exploring, in a flexible way, new processes to achieve the result that we all want. The current circumstances show great promise. We have heard about the issues, but so long as we build up a momentum behind the peace process and keep making it clear that results are being achieved in a practical way, our discussions may be instrumental in achieving the necessary breakthroughs in decommissioning and punishment beatings, so that we may make peace a lasting and consolidated outcome. At the moment, the process promises to deliver an awful lot more than many of us imagined possible.

9.13 pm

Mr. Ingram: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I do not intend to go over all the points, because I dealt with many of the issues raised in the debate in my opening remarks. I pay tribute to hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, because they have raised important issues. Everyone welcomed the order, although such a welcome was not forthcoming when the first order was placed before the House.

I shall deal with two key points that the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) made. He said that there was no obligation on the Government to deal with prisoner releases within a time frame. I shall quote to him from the Good Friday agreement. On page 25, paragraph 3 of the section on prisoners says:

"Both Governments will complete a review process within a fixed time frame and set prospective release dates for all qualifying prisoners. The review process would provide for the advance of the release dates of qualifying prisoners while allowing account to be taken of the seriousness of the offences for which the person was convicted and the need to protect the community. In addition, the intention would be that should the circumstances allow it, any qualifying prisoners who remained in custody two years after the commencement of the scheme would be released at that point."

Importantly, paragraph 4 says:

"The Governments will seek to enact the appropriate legislation to give effect to these arrangements by the end of June 1998."

We were not able to do that, but we completed the legislation, which was endorsed by the House, in July 1998. I want to make it clear that the Government will continue to honour all their commitments under the Good Friday agreement. We expect every other party to that agreement to do the same.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone warned that the Government and Ministers responsible for such matters should be wary of the LVF returning to its violent ways after it has achieved the release of its prisoners, under its own name, by redefining itself under another name or by using a proxy organisation. I again want to make it clear that, if any organisation returns to violence and is in breach of its ceasefire, it should understand that its prisoners will have been released on licence, and released prisoners will be recalled to prison if they either give support to an organisation that re-engages in terrorist activities or re-engage in such activities themselves.

That was made abundantly clear when the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 was being passed. Prisoners of a despecified organisation who have been or are likely to be released in the future are on licence, and the position will constantly be reviewed. Their organisations and any acts that they may carry out in support of those organisations will be monitored.

Mr. Maginnis: I am grateful to the Minister for his comments, but that is such a conditional assurance as to be meaningless. We have already pointed out that, once prisoners are released, the onus is on the Government to prove not that the organisation has changed its name and is active again, but that released prisoners are acting in support of that organisation, which means that everything has to start from the beginning.

The Minister knows that records are being pushed to one side and destroyed. People may have been out of prison for some time, so it will be virtually impossible for any effective action to be taken—in a normal society that may be acceptable. The Minister should recognise that this is a useless measure, because that would make him and those responsible more alert to what they are doing as prisoners are released.

Mr. Ingram: I do not want to open up a debate on this matter. I ask the hon. Gentleman to take the assurances that I am giving him from the Dispatch Box, which the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have also given, about the nature of the sentencing legislation. It is specific and has not been put in place merely to be implemented and then forgotten about. We rigorously hold to those conditions. If an organisation returns to its violent ways, any individual who has been released as a member of that organisation and who subsequently participates in support of the organisation or of any organisation that is acting as a proxy for that organisation will be returned to prison. I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept assurances that have been given in good faith, and with determination and commitment.

We must hope that all the organisations that we have despecified maintain the ceasefire, and that the organisations that are the subject of the order hear what has been said and understand the message—that the people north and south in the island of Ireland want a peaceful future. They do not act other than for their own

[Mr. Ingram]

approach; they do not represent any body of opinion. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone made that point in his speech. The good people of the island of Ireland—both Northern Ireland and the Republic—made their view clear in the referendum, and I think that more people are signing up to what the future will entail if we can move the process forward.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) raised the issue of what people describe as punishment beatings. As I have said from the Dispatch Box before, the word "punishment" should not be used in this context, because it gives a form of justification to paramilitary assaults performed on people within their own community. The hon. Gentleman asked for a number of assurances in regard to the Government's approach. I have given them before, and I now give them again. We are resolute, and will continue to monitor the position. When we can exert pressure to end such action, we will.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary is active in that regard as well, but we must prove the case, and we must have evidence of where the action is taking place. We cannot act on the basis of what people may be saying to the newspapers, or what some people may believe to be happening; in all instances, the case must be proved before we can act. Nevertheless, the conduct of those who perpetrate such acts against their own people is unacceptable and should cease forthwith, as I said in response to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay).

We have had a useful discussion. I think that the motion has enabled us to make progress, and I hope that we can build on that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Specified Organisations) (No. 2) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Stephen Twigg be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Derek Twigg be added.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

PETITION

East Kent Health Authority

9.22 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The petition has been signed by 34,000 people gathered by an organisation called Concern for Hospitals in East Kent, which opposes the rundown of Kent and Canterbury hospital in my constituency. The petition was prompted by outrage about the consultation process organised by East Kent health authority, following which the views of no fewer than 27 organisations were misrepresented in the authority's document. In view of that, the petitioners say that they lack confidence in East Kent health authority to provide appropriate health care for the population of east Kent.

The Petitioners therefore ask that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Health to take steps to replace the current members of the East Kent Health Authority with people who will truly respect the health needs of the people of East Kent.

I thoroughly endorse every word of that.

To lie upon the Table.

Clothing and Textile Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

9.23 pm

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): It is delightful to be able to introduce a debate on the prospects of the clothing and textile industries. The debate refers to the carpet and footwear industries as well, because a newly re-established all-party group is attempting to reach across the spectrum of the sector, and those industries constitute an important part of our work. Indeed, my work as chairman of the new group has been rewarding, although it has coincided with a huge fall in the number of jobs in the industry; I hope that it is a coincidence and not cause and effect. The group is working hard on behalf of the sector. I should like to place on record my thanks to all the members of the group who have taken part.

One of our main achievements has been to establish an industry advisory group, which brings together industrialists, academics, employers and trade unions from throughout the sector. It is to that body that we turn for advice, on which some of my remarks will be based.

Another implication of the establishment of that group is that I am forced, although it is a pleasant duty, to wear British-made clothing on every public occasion. My suit and tie were made in the United Kingdom. Indeed, everything that I wear that you cannot see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was also made in the UK. After close conversations this evening, I am delighted to be able to report that the Minister is also wearing a British-made suit.

The advisory group to the all-party parliamentary group estimates that, this year, some 25,000 jobs have been lost in the industry. In the trade-unionised sector alone, job losses have been running at about 500 a month. I give just one example of how important the industry is in one region. In the east midlands, the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Clothing and Textiles Association reports that 3,000 jobs will be lost this year; that represents some 6 per cent. of the sector in the region.

I do not want to be a merchant of doom—far from it; we must not, whatever we do, talk down the industry. Nor is it responsible to talk down the manufacturing sector as a whole. However—it is a big however—there is no doubt that the industry is in what the Governor of the Bank of England has described as an exposed sector of the economy.

The industry is important to many communities, to seven regions and, of course, to the national economy. According to House of Commons statistics, based on the industrial classification statistics that are available, the industry directly employs some 359,000 people. That makes it larger than the farming industry, car industry and chemical industry, to name just three. In answer to a question, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"The textiles industry is one of the largest manufacturing sectors in the United Kingdom, with sales of more than £17 billion."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 369.]

The total value of exports last year was £8 billion.

This debate is not, however, about macro-economic policy. Sustained, stable growth within the context of low inflation is what our industry needs. Having said that, there is no doubt that the value of sterling recently has caused problems. Nor, however, must we over-egg the pudding. Sometimes, the value of sterling has been used by industrialists as an excuse to bring forward a process that was happening anyway. However, I cite the case of Saddleworth woollen mill in my constituency, which closes tragically this Friday after 150 years in the woollen business—woollen spinning on the site can be traced back 1,000 years—with the loss of a further 110 jobs. There is no doubt that it was the value of the pound, particularly in the second half of last year, that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Overall, the value of exports in the first half of this year has fallen by 20 per cent. That coincided with a number of events throughout the world: the collapse of the far east, or certainly the significant fall of the far east market, and the near collapse of the Russian market. Interestingly, the mild summer has added to the problems. I know that even the Prime Minister could not solve that one, although I have heard people in my party demanding a solution. Whatever the problems, whether they be short term or outside the influence of Ministers, all of us in the industry know that globalisation has been going on throughout this century.

I do not wish to base my appeal for support of the clothing and textile industry on nostalgia or heritage—although the United Kingdom continues to produce the best cloth and clothing in the world. I could mention Nottingham lace, Savile row suits or even—given my Lancastrian background—Yorkshire wool, but I could not do justice to them. Kidderminster carpets are the best in the world. In my own region, king cotton is, and has been for many years, the market leader. The clothing and textile industries in Northern Ireland and Scotland produce some of the world's finest products. If I have omitted to mention the constituencies of any colleagues, it is not to be rude, but only because the list is very long. As I said, I do not want our appeal to be based on nostalgia; it must be based on the importance of the industry to our economy, and on the industry's many future opportunities.

Globalisation brings new problems. Production in a clothing factory can be switched offshore with one telephone call from a buyer—as many factories across the country have regularly discovered. Despite the appalling exploitation of labour, including child labour, in the developing world, developing areas are developing a very sophisticated clothing and textile sector of their own. Exploitation is still occurring in our country, too, although I hope that that will be dealt with by the minimum wage and other measures. For all those reasons, the industry has to have a strategy, and to work in partnership with the Government on it.

The group and our advisers have identified various elements of a strategy. The first element is that we must work to the action plan that has been drawn up by trade unions and employers as part of the social partnership process, and will be discussed next week with my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry. The document will be the manifesto of the lobby of the House that will take place next Wednesday.

We must address the productivity problem. According to the plan, our productivity is 30 per cent. below that of our European competitors—although I should think that many workers in the industry would find that figure hard to believe. I do not accept, as some have said, that the minimum wage and other employment rights, such as

[Mr. Phil Woolas]

the 48-hour week, will make matters worse. We have to increase standards and quality if the industry is to have a future.

There is absolutely no future in chasing down employment costs. We could never compete with Morocco, for example, where the average hourly rate for clothing worker is 5p an hour. Some hon. Members—I have heard them say it—think that we should compete on such a basis.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My hon. Friend mentioned Morocco. The work force of Bairdwear, in my constituency, were told just a few weeks ago of the closure of their plant. Their work is being transferred to Morocco, where slave labour rates operate. Does he agree that a job could be done collectively, perhaps within the European Union, to address such issues?

Mr. Woolas: I very much agree. I have been told of cases in which employees in the industry have been videoed doing their jobs, so that the videos can be sent overseas to teach other people how to do those jobs. I very much agree with my hon. Friend's comments.

We need high investment, high-tech solutions and marketing and design inputs. Many of our industrialists are already taking action on those matters, and good luck to them. The footwear industry is a good example of an industry that has turned the corner. It has a social partnership plan, which is working. That industry has gone upmarket and is successfully marketing its goods. We need to address the question of how the Department of Trade and Industry can help our exporters, as there is no doubt that export is our future.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Does my hon. Friend share my concern at the statement made to our advisory group last week by the British Apparel and Textile Confederation that the DTI has agreed to support only 19 exhibitions and seminars overseas, compared with 31 last year? Does he agree that our textile and clothing industry can compete overseas only on the basis of the excellence in design and innovation shown by the best firms in my constituency and his, and that that requires the Government to put every possible effort into promoting that excellence overseas?

Mr. Woolas: Yes. We should be encouraging more rather than fewer overseas trade missions and exhibitions. I shall be interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say about that.

We are telling our manufacturers to move upmarket, to increase design input and to go for niche markets, but those markets can only be global. Therefore, the value of sterling becomes even more important to our international sales force, notwithstanding the cheapening of imports. We must support the work of our sales force.

I do not wish to sound over-critical. I congratulate my right hon. Friends on their superb success in getting rid of the cotton dumping duties in the European Union. Many of my constituents are grateful for that. However, I think it was General Jiap who said that we must fight on all fronts at all times. In a very exposed market, we need to be reassured that our Ministers are following that philosophy in relation to clothing and textiles, if not in other activities.

We need quickly to establish national training organisations. Training is too fragmented and we are not providing the industry with what it needs. We need to ensure that the assisted area status maps, which are being redrawn, prioritise the clothing and textile industry. The ending of objective 2 regional funding could hit the clothing and textile sector in particular as it is regionally based. I plead with Ministers to prioritise the clothing and textile industry when they draw up submissions on the new European regional funding model.

Retex has been a great success, but we are about to lose it. We must not forget that negotiations on the multi-fibre agreement will soon be on us again. Goodness knows what will happen when MFA protection is removed.

In addition, we need to address the major structural problems that underpin the process. It has nothing to do with the value of sterling—the value against the major currencies that affect the sector is lower than it was two years ago—but relates to the relationship between retailers and manufacturers. Some of the problems are outside the Minister's control, but none of them is outside his influence.

The DTI-funded work of the apparel and textile challenge comes close to achieving the correct solution. We cannot have a retail sector that bullies the manufacturers or a manufacturing sector that is not flexible and responsive to the retail sector, as that will push production overseas. We must address that problem.

Nor can we base our appeal for the future of the sector just on patriotism. If we want consumers to buy British, we must make British best. There is no premium on the label "Made in Britain" in this country, although British goods sold overseas carry a huge premium because of their label. It is ironic that manufacturers label goods for overseas "Made in Britain", but often fail to label goods intended for the domestic market. The Government can give enthusiasm to the process. We need to examine the labelling laws, perhaps to take into account ethical production issues such as child labour. I believe that consumers have a right to know whether production methods are unethical and the country of origin of the goods that they buy. I also believe that the best badge of quality in this sector and many others is the label that says "union made". In the United States, that is the kitemark of quality. If it is good enough for the entrepreneurial United States of America, it is good enough for my constituents.

The industry must shed its rag trade image. We cannot continue to talk the industry down; it is too important. We cannot treat the industry as a Cinderella sector, because it is not. We have the best cloth makers, the best shoe makers, the best carpet weavers and the best designers. This country has a great reputation for quality; we should build on that. I urge Ministers to do all in their power to support the social partners in their endeavours.

9.40 pm

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas) on securing this debate on such an important sector of British manufacturing industry. I have the privilege to represent Wyre Forest, which includes

Kidderminster—the home of the British carpet industry. More carpets are made in Kidderminster than in any other part of Britain.

My hon. Friend has referred to the problems of the high pound. I endorse what he has said. They are long-term problems, not short-term ones. The markets that have been lost in Europe were lost long before the Labour Government came to power. With stability in macro-economic policy, those markets are now back within the grasp of the manufacturers that I represent, but there is still a feeling that the high pound is detrimental to our ability to sell to Europe. I hope that, as interest rates come down over the next 12 months, the value of the pound will ease slightly, to the benefit of manufacturers in my constituency.

I thank Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry for their excellent work in preventing a ban on carpets by Russia, which was threatened during the summer and would have removed a substantial market. We were particularly worried in Kidderminster, because the prospect of a large amount of cut-price carpet from Belgium, much of it produced in circumstances that are, at best, very close to breaching EU rules, caused great concern. Despite all the good work of the DTI, other circumstances have caused the Russian market to collapse. We now fear a substantial ingress of carpet from Belgium. I ask Ministers to bear that in mind when considering the sector in the coming months.

My constituency is not in an EU-funded area. Will Ministers bear in mind the detrimental effect that substantial grants to carpet companies in parts of the United Kingdom that are fortunate enough to be in EU assisted areas would have on companies in my constituency, which are in direct competition, when considering applications for grants or support? I am thinking particularly of companies in Ulster, which have received substantial grants in recent years and are now competing directly with Kidderminster.

There are several high spots. I do not want my hon. Friend the Minister to think that the progress made in the carpet industry in Kidderminster has not been noticed or that the achievements should go unrecorded. World-class companies are being built and investment is high. Investment in marketing, technology and computers is impressive. Companies manufacturing carpets in other parts of the world are being taken over and run by British companies in Kidderminster, with the benefit of the manufacturing know-how of the west midlands. That means that, at the moment, jobs in the traditional industry in Kidderminster are reasonably secure. I hope that the industry there will expand, not contract.

I shall conclude by making two points. First, will the Minister bear in mind the fact that those of us who are concerned about the housing market do not view it purely as a construction issue? When people move house, they spend considerable amounts of money on white goods and carpet. A steady housing market—not a boom or a bust—is essential to the health of the domestic carpet industry.

Secondly, will the Minister use his influence, as those of us in the all-party group do, to encourage members of the public to buy British? By buying British, they are not only buying the best but securing and creating jobs in some important areas of the country.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Dr. Kim Howells): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas) on the way in which he has raised this important issue, as I do my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) and for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on assisting him. I notice the huge interest among the Opposition parties—Tories, Liberal Democrats and nationalists—in this extraordinarily important debate on manufacturing. It is a disgrace that they cannot even be bothered to turn up for such a debate.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth on reviving the clothing, textile, carpet and footwear industries all-party group, and especially on the formation of the sectoral advisory committee. Such joint approaches are the way forward. We have suffered too often from being unable to tap the enormous potential in our work force in many sectors. My hon. Friend has taken an imaginative approach to moving forward at a difficult time for the industry.

The Government recognise the substantial contribution that the United Kingdom's textile, clothing and footwear industries make to the economy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth has reminded us, they have a turnover in excess of £17 billion a year and employ about 350,000 people. That is a huge number. We have had many debates on the steel and coal industries, but I cannot remember when we last debated the textile industry—still less the carpet or footwear industries. Yet many are located in some of the most vulnerable industrial areas, very often on the edge of rural parts, where the alternatives to such employment are very few and far between. This debate is very timely, and I wish that many more hon. Members were present to take part in it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth mentioned exchange rates as a factor in closures. As he said, the exchange rate is now broadly the same as it was when the Government came to power. The important difference, as I am sure he will tell his constituents and those in the industry who are trying to do something about the situation, is that inflation is firmly under control. In addition, long-term interest rates are at their lowest for 35 years. That makes a difference; it makes the industry less vulnerable, and poses new challenges. Although growth is expected to be slow, no one is forecasting a re-run of the early 1990s, when, under the previous Government, manufacturing output fell by 7 per cent. and 1 million jobs were lost as the economy suffered its longest recession since the second world war.

I turn for a moment to the support that my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry is giving to the effort that everybody is making to try to drive up productivity.

A stable macro-economic environment is an important external factor that provides the opportunity for the industry to flourish, but it is not enough. Our industries have to be globally competitive as well, and the Government have a role to play in that respect. My hon. Friend reminded us of studies that show that parts of our textile sector are 30 per cent. less competitive than those of our main European competitors. There are all sorts of variables in that equation, but I am absolutely convinced that one in particular is the key—investment.

[Dr. Kim Howells]

I have no doubt that, if firms here had invested in the way that Italian and American firms have invested over the years, we would not be facing the current situation—my hon. Friend reminded us not to talk down the industry by referring to a crisis. There are some superbly efficient firms in operation, but the difficulties would have been far less had there been proper levels of investment. It is all part of the British malaise—refusing to invest and assuming that firms can stagger along by paying lower wages, without realising that technology is advancing around them.

My hon. Friends mentioned the problem of technology transfer to places such as Morocco, and it is true that technology transfer has never been easier than it is now. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth mentioned videos that show workers in Morocco how the job is done. Such technology transfers will not stop and no rules will be introduced to prohibit them. The economies of the world are opening up and captive markets are becoming fewer. We have to try to understand how we can compete in the new world.

The way to compete is to ensure that we add real value to the carpets we create. We have some of the best art colleges and fashion houses in the world, and fashion and design are crucial to the textile sector. I want a rocket to be put up many of our universities and institutions of higher and further education, so that they start to talk to industry and embark on joint projects with sectors such as textiles. That will encourage everyone to become involved in a crusade to exploit the marvellous design capabilities that this country has. The Government, through the Departments for Trade and Industry and for Education and Employment, have a role to play in encouraging such a partnership approach.

Mr. Lock: Does the Minister recognise that, in some parts of the country, local further education colleges are more innovative and imaginative than their traditional university counterparts? I am thinking particularly of Kidderminster college in my constituency, which runs an impressive textiles degree and works closely with industry. It is now finding that students from across the world, especially the far east, are coming to Kidderminster to study carpets and carpet design, because of the expertise that is found nowhere else in Britain.

Dr. Howells: Kidderminster has a great reputation and long may it flourish. I was an art student in the 1960s, although I must admit that I was far more interested in revolution than in art. I remember giving up painting on 28 May 1968, because it was bourgeois individualism. My mother called me mad, and she was dead right.

We are only just beginning to understand what value our universities and colleges can add. My hon. Friend is right to say that further education colleges often outstrip our best universities, which have a stultified view of the relationship between academia and industry.

Mr. Miller: Will my hon. Friend invite another partner into that equation—the major high street chains? They are the buyers of the products and the cause of some of the closures, such as that of Bairdwear in my constituency. After all, unless they become involved in the debate, those of their customers who currently work in industry will not be able to afford to buy their products in future.

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend makes a good point. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth is looking carefully at ways of bringing major buyers of textiles, footwear and carpets into the debate so that they understand that their symbiotic relationship cannot be allowed to wither on the vine. The best buyers are interested in talking about that relationship.

Buyers should want to buy from nearby producers, and their relationship is so important. Why must products be produced in Morocco or China? It is logical for products to be produced on demand, quickly and to meet changing market demands as closely as possible to the markets. We should start celebrating that fact and find out how to achieve it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I realise that most of the Minister's hon. Friends are sitting below the Gangway, but I am here and it is to the Chair that he should address his remarks.

Dr. Howells: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is late and I have clearly forgotten that fact.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley referred to the tangible ways in which we can help the industry. I wish to refer to the support for the exhibitions and seminars abroad scheme. I am delighted that we have received a record 1,000-plus bids for support under the new scheme. I take that to indicate broad satisfaction with the new arrangements. We have included about 40 per cent. of the bids in the programme for 1999–2000. With 45 of the clothing sector bids included—some 62 per cent.—the industry has, in fact, done much better than the average.

Organisations bidding for support have told us that they expect to take well over 900 supported clothing firms to the 45 events. Despite the slightly smaller programme, that is well above the 770 firms expected to be supported in 1998–99. My statistics and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley diverge, and I shall check to ensure that we arrive somewhere near the truth as quickly as I can.

The DTI is not only helping companies to identify and exploit market opportunities overseas, but at home. The Department provides support to the apparel and textiles challenge, which is dedicated to the improvement of the textiles and clothing supply chain. The challenge organises meet-the-buyer forums around the country, which provide the opportunity to bring textiles and clothing manufacturers together with potential customers. Six events have been held so far this year, with each event generating, on average, £500,000 of new business for the participants.

More generally, we understand that the UK high street is—as my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) pointed out—a very demanding market, and that retailers here have very high expectations of their suppliers. Through the apparel and textiles challenge, we want to encourage a dialogue between UK suppliers and retailers that will help each of them to understand more thoroughly the other's needs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth and his delegation will discuss these matters with my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry next week, and they will explore the ways in which the industry can be helped. The days are long gone when we could bail out firms that were failing—nor would we want to. The textile, carpet and footwear industries have the experience and the wherewithal to compete with anyone in the world. It is a question of having the confidence and the will to invest in those sectors, and not to be frightened by those who would preach a gloomy message—that the whole of world production will move to China or another part of the world where poverty wages are paid. I do not believe that that is the case.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): It may interest hon. Members to know that the Stroud valleys were built on the textile industry. The Government could provide help by encouraging organisations such as business links and development agencies to give training the emphasis that it deserves. I am sure that that would be very helpful to industries such as textiles.

Dr. Howells: That is an important point, and a good one on which to end. If we have the confidence to invest in new machinery, new technology and new techniques in training an already excellent work force to learn new skills, we will be able to compete with anyone in the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 18 November 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Environmental Taxation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

9.34 am

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): The ballot has given the House the opportunity to hold a timely debate—timely because it is taking place soon after the return of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister from the climate negotiations in Buenos Aires. I was fortunate to be called to speak last July in the Adjournment debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on the preparations for the Buenos Aires talks. I am sure that the House will join me in paying tribute once again to the Deputy Prime Minister for his considerable achievements in that vital process.

The Government pledged to put the environment at the heart of policy making. We all know that they are committed to ambitious targets for reducing emissions that are seriously damaging the environment both directly and indirectly, through climate change. The two are often connected.

The Select Committee on Environmental Audit, of which I am proud to be a member, was set up to be, in the Deputy Prime Minister's words,

"a terrier snapping at the Government's heels".

Some of us believe that we have been not a terrier, but a rottweiler. We have tried to live up to those expectations.

Today's debate should be seen as an extension of that activity. Its subject is the environmental effects of taxation. There are many aspects of that—such as transport, housing, energy and agriculture—on which other hon. Members will want to speak. I shall give a brief introduction and concentrate on some aspects of energy taxation, a matter that is relevant to my constituents in Peterborough.

The basic aim of green tax reform is to shift the burden from "goods" to "bads". "Goods" are economic activities such as income generation, job creation and added value. "Bads" are pollution and excessive use of resources such as energy—excessive from the point of view of society. For example, petrol creates costs in terms of pollution and congestion, which are borne by society. Thus, the consumption of petrol is excessive from a societal point of view. Measures could be designed to help energy-intensive industries to adapt.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Brinton: No, I have just started and I want to make progress.

Other policy instruments could protect potentially disadvantaged groups, such as the rural poor, who are more reliant on cars and would suffer unduly from increased fuel duties.

There is a much greater role for indirect taxation in promoting energy efficiency. Far too many anomalies discriminate against energy conservation materials, whose present high VAT rating is a disincentive for householders to invest in them.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Brinton: I am pleased to give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank my hon. Friend, and I welcome the debate. As she considers it important to conserve fuel, does she agree that it would have made more sense if the battalion headquarters of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineer 101 Battalion, which was based in my constituency, had stayed there, where there is a population of 300,000, rather than being moved to Queensbury, where there is not a similar population, which will mean more vehicle movements from Lancashire to Wales?

Mrs. Brinton: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and sympathise with the sentiments that he has so eloquently expressed.

In his March Budget the Chancellor announced partial VAT relief, with a drop in VAT from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent. on the installation of energy-saving materials funded under certain Government grants. That was designed to help people suffering from fuel poverty. My right hon. Friend said that the cut in VAT would help to insulate 40,000 more homes a year, which is good, but it is not a significant benefit to the environment, and it does not cover payments by householders over and above Government grants received.

I know that the Government are pursuing with their European partners the legality of a reduced or even a zero rating, about which there has long been disagreement. Perhaps the Minister will tell us later about progress on that front. I look forward to his comments.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Brinton: I am making progress.

Low-polluting road fuels such as liquefied petroleum gas and so-called city petrol produced by Sainsburys are on sale in my constituency, Peterborough, among other places. Their use would similarly be encouraged by a lower VAT rating. I welcomed some moves in that direction in the last Budget. There is a much larger potential market for such fuels, but if manufacturers and distributors are to make the necessary investment and commitment, they need to know that any policy changes will remain in place and progress for a number of years.

Last February, the Treasury promised

"a new approach to environmental taxes that will be fair to future generations."

[Mrs. Brinton]

In the recent pre-Budget report, we read that the Government are

"committed to exploring scope for using taxes in the strategy of sustainable development".

However, there are few clues as to when we might expect the results of apparently on-going deliberations. Bound with the bundle of pre-Budget reports issued to all hon. Members—and appearing to be part of them, in the same green and white format—was the Marshall report on economic instruments and the business use of energy. When Sir Colin Marshall, the former chairman of British Airways, was appointed to head a panel of industrialists tasked to investigate energy taxes, one commentator said that it was like

"putting King Herod in charge of child care since aviation is one of the worst contributors to climate change and the industry has lobbied hard to ensure that it pays no green taxes."

None the less, the report concluded:

"there probably is a role for a tax if businesses of all sizes and from all sectors are to contribute to improved energy efficiency and help meet the UK's emissions targets."

The United Kingdom should obviously make its own decisions about meeting its own considerations. However, there are precedents in other European countries concerning the effects of carbon tax from which we may learn some lessons.

A carbon tax was introduced in Sweden in 1991, and the most recent evaluation found that it had delivered a 9 per cent. cut in CO_2 emissions in three years. On the one hand, district heating—which pays the full rate of tax—showed a dramatic switch from fossil fuels to biomass, and fossil fuel use shifted significantly from coal to gas. On the other hand, when the tax rate for industry was reduced in 1993 to 25 per cent. of the full rate, fossil fuel consumption rose, with a corresponding rise in CO_2 emissions by 21 per cent. in one Swedish district between 1992 and 1994.

Sir Colin Marshall recommended that a clear signal be given as to the long-term direction of policy in order to help businesses plan for future investment and maximise the environmental impact of a tax. He also said that any measures should be subject to detailed consultation. I am particularly happy to endorse that proposal, especially as the economic and social costs of some proposed taxes may be too high. Other measures, such as voluntary self-regulation, which are often based on enlightened self-interest may work much better—and, indeed, may already be in place. The agricultural interests in my constituency would certainly support that view.

Other proposals might appear to be environmentally friendly in a narrow context—for example, some recycling initiatives—but they involve extra environmental costs, such as transportation, when considered more widely. Consultation is not only desirable but absolutely necessary, often on a case-by-case basis, in order to weigh the advantages and disadvantages and the different interests involved. I know that that is happening now in some cases. However, consultation should not be a recipe for unnecessary delay.

The first report of the Environmental Audit Committee—I am pleased to see members of that Committee from both sides of the House present in the Chamber today—made a recommendation concerning the potential of the tax system to deliver environmental objectives and make economic development more sustainable. It called on the Government to establish an advisory body on environmental taxation—the Committee has certainly been a terrier, if not a rottweiler—preferably in the form of a green tax commission. I take this opportunity to reiterate that recommendation.

Such a commission, by whatever name, would bring together the different interests involved in a more transparent and neutral forum—the Government are committed to openness—leaving the final decisions to Government. It would invite interested bodies to submit evidence on proposed environmental taxes, and examine the potential pitfalls and trade-offs that might arise from particular decisions.

For example, it would have to establish whether a proposed measure would have an adverse impact on competition, and decide whether that was outweighed by any other advantages that would result. Such bodies need not be yet another layer of bureaucracy. Importantly, the existence of a green tax commission would make it much easier to take an overall strategic view of environmental tax making. I hope that we will not go down the route of a fragmented, "here today, gone tomorrow", piecemeal approach.

The Marshall report concluded that revenues should be recycled in full to business

"with at least some of them channelled into schemes aimed directly at promoting energy efficiency . . . low carbon technologies and/or energy audits/advice for SMEs."

I particularly welcome the latter, as a pioneering audit of city-wide energy, conducted by the Environment City Trust with support from our largest local employer, Perkins Engines, was launched recently in my constituency. I am pleased to report that that launch took place in the presence of the new Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). Marshall's last recommendation was:

"the design of any tax should ensure that Combined Heat and Power (CHP) is not disadvantaged. It should also aim, where possible, to increase incentives for the take-up of renewable sources of energy."

That is good, but perhaps too cautious. I hope that that will not be the last word on the subject. I regard Marshall as a beginning and not an end in itself.

A major finding of the Peterborough energy audit was that nearly half the city's share of the Kyoto target—which, I am told, is 220,000 tonnes of CO_2—could be met by small CHP schemes in business and industry. That sector accounts for about two thirds of CO_2 emissions and two thirds of energy spending in the city. We are still awaiting the Department of Trade and Industry's review of renewables—the Environmental Audit Committee is certainly awaiting it with bated breath.

The United Kingdom has a target to produce 10 per cent. of electricity from renewable sources by 2010. At present, we have the lowest rate in Europe at around 1 per cent. Studies show that both wind and wave power could meet the United Kingdom's electricity needs three times over and that solar power could provide two thirds of our needs. However, all those forms of power generation require Government support whether by way of interdepartmental co-operation—as occurred between the DTI and the Ministry of Agriculture in the development of energy crops—research and development or changes to the structure and functioning of the electricity market.

The non-fossil fuel obligation, which obliges power companies to buy from more expensive renewable sources, has helped to get the renewables industry going and, in some cases, has driven the price down. However, progress has been intermittent, with modest targets. Recent research shows that the extension of NFFO alone will not allow Government targets to be met. Government investment in renewables has been insignificant compared with the billions of pounds in subsidies granted to the nuclear and fossil fuel industries.

European industry leads the world in wind and solar power, and the United Kingdom is a leader in combined heat and power. There are major United Kingdom export opportunities at present, and some of the large oil companies—such as BP and Shell, to name but two—are beginning to invest heavily in renewables. The Government should do all in their power to encourage the development of renewables for the benefit of the country as a whole and to help avoid catastrophic climate change.

Attending the launch of the energy audit in my constituency—I was particularly pleased to be there—were many of those engaged commercially and otherwise in the promotion of renewables and CHP. I was extremely impressed by the extent and quality of the involvement. Business certainly understands the potential opportunities for creating wealth and employment in this field. A key manufacturer in my constituency, Peter Brotherhood, has just obtained a multi-million-pound contract for supplying wind turbines for a renewable energy scheme in the Fens. That scheme will obviously create jobs both in Peterborough and where the turbines are installed.

I have come to realise that another advantage of renewable energy is that it is localised rather than centralised, and therefore can act to regenerate local communities by creating employment, with a knock-on benefit for the local and regional economies. However, many of those present at the launch made it clear that they need some help—and they need it now. They need a kick start to enable them to obtain a viable toehold in the market, from which to develop, before others gain the crucial lead that in business often means that the weakest and those left behind are driven to the wall.

The current situation has been described by my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry as "win, win, win". By that, he meant that the encouragement of renewable energy means that the United Kingdom can simultaneously meet its emission targets, boost industry—which is what the Government are pledged to do—and create jobs. In the summer, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury told the all-party environment group that the general approach of the Treasury to environmental taxation might be described as "prudent enthusiasm". "Prudent" is a favourite word in Treasury-speak.

I hope that the debate will highlight the degree of enthusiasm in the House—and, indeed, the country—for environmental taxation, and signal that the need for it is rather more urgent than people appear to believe at present.

9.50 am

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am grateful to have caught your eye, Madam Speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on securing this important debate. As a fellow member of the Environmental Audit Committee, I agree with her that the Committee has turned into a rottweiler, and has rottweilered many Ministers in its 12-month span. Environmental taxation is especially important to that Committee; indeed, it is important to us all—it is the coming issue with which the House will be involved.

The hon. Member for Peterborough referred to the Labour party's repeated commitments on the environment, and mentioned the manifesto commitment to

"put the environment at the heart of policy making".

When the Financial Secretary appeared before our Committee, she reiterated that she wanted to

"ensure that the environment is placed at the centre of our objectives for the tax system".

One would hope that the Government considered the issue to have equal importance, but, alas, the warm words are not being matched by action.

As one who has been a member of the Finance Bill Standing Committee for the past two years, I know at first hand how difficult it is to put amendments relating to the environment—which, in most cases, are tabled by Opposition Members—on to the agenda. During the Committee's consideration of this year's Budget, only one amendment on the environment tabled by an Opposition Member—and precious little from Labour Members—was accepted. It dealt with a tiny technical issue which I happened to raise, in respect of the taxation treatment of company cars that had been converted to road fuel gases.

In the whole of the 1998 Budget, there was no mention of preferential treatment of taxation for road fuel gases; no mention of incentives to promote oxidation catalysts; no mention of incentives to promote use of brown-field sites in preference to ripping up the green belt, and the discrepancy between value added tax on renovation and new-build remains; and no mention of corporate incentives to promote the preferential tax treatment of company public transport season tickets. There was nothing to tackle the distortions on company car mileage rates—we still encourage the absurdity of an incentive for people to drive more miles; nothing to deter water pollution through pesticides; and nothing to encourage the more environmentally sustainable use of rural land.

That bears out the fears of the Environmental Audit Committee, whose pre-Budget report said:

"It is difficult to reconcile the status of environmentally sustainable growth as a 'core feature' of the Government's economic policy."

Indeed, on environmental matters the previous Budget amounted to an action-free zone. Friends of the Earth called it "green as smog". More politely, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said:

"So far, the Treasury has made little substantive progress in using the tax system to protect the environment."

More recently, the green Budget failed to tackle the issue, with the exception of the bludgeon measure of the energy tax and a consultation paper on vehicle excise duty. The comprehensive spending review made virtually no mention of environmental considerations, but there was a lot about spending more money on the back of dodgy growth estimates, with no link to their environmental impact.

The job of the Environmental Audit Committee has been the auditing of the environmental impacts of Government policy. In the Chancellor's speech to the

[Mr. Tim Loughton]

Confederation of British Industry conference on 2 November, there were plenty of old chestnuts about global turmoil, being prudent and cautious, productivity top-up, Europe, prudence and investment—that old one again—and mature patriotism. Despite the fact that the energy tax announced a few weeks ago will have the biggest impact on business, there was not a single word about the environment or the use of environmental taxes on business.

Even the Prime Minister's Mansion House speech a few days ago to the heart of the business and investment community—which these days might be expected to act as an antidote to the Chancellor's own thoughts—contained not a word about the relationship between business and the environment and green taxes. What Conservative Members fear most is that the broad-brush use of tax in the name of environmental improvement is a surrogate measure to fill the coffers of the Treasury.

The insensitive use of tax alone can be counter-productive. There has been no more stark example of that than the state of the British road haulage industry, where the combination of the increased 6 per cent. fuel escalator and the ending of the European cabotage regulations on 1 July has meant a flood of French and Belgian lorries on United Kingdom roads which pay no tax and import diesel from France and Belgium. Diesel is taxed at 24.5p per litre in France and at 19.1p per litre in Belgium. In the United Kingdom, it is taxed at a whopping 43.7p per litre. That is hardly a level playing field.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): As the Government have been in office for only a year or so, most of that difference came about through the imposition of the fuel price escalator by the previous Conservative Government, who raised £25 billion in extra taxation. Does the hon. Gentleman now think that that was wrong or right?

Mr. Loughton: Not at all; the hon. Gentleman misses my point. I said that a combination of the increased escalator and the ending of cabotage rules on 1 July has been a dangerous combination and has had an immediate effect on the British freight haulage industry. If the hon. Gentleman had remained a member of the Environmental Audit Committee for more than 10 days, he might have been aware of those facts. As a result, British lorry firms are seriously considering moving to the continent to avoid the extra taxes—taxes which, by the end of 2002, are likely to be costing the freight haulage industry an extra £5 billion a year.

Who wins in all this? Not the environment, because we are simply exchanging British fumes from British lorries on British roads for Belgian fumes from Belgian lorries on British roads. Who wins? Not the British freight business, because about 26,000 jobs are at stake. It is not enough, as the Minister may say, that the allowance of £500 against vehicle excise duty for particular traps being fitted will compensate, when it costs £3,500 to fit those systems. Who wins? Not the Government, as business moves to the continent and pays taxes to other European Governments.

The aggregates tax is another example; a broad-brush approach to taxing quarrying will not result in reduced quarrying of material, unless we shut down the schools, hospitals and road-building programmes.

I shall deal briefly with the energy tax and Lord Marshall's report, which the hon. Member for Peterborough mentioned. The report turned out to be a downstream tax levied on business consumers. It is not a carbon tax, because a genuine carbon tax would be levied upstream: coal-fired power stations would pay most; gas-fired power stations would pay less; and nuclear power stations would pay nothing.

The Government have prejudged the issue by blocking the expansion of gas-fired power stations for political reasons, but the switch to gas has had the biggest effect on reducing CO_2 emissions. Indeed, it has been calculated that

"burning 25 million tonnes of coal, rather than getting the same power from gas, produces in extra pollution an extra 28.7 million tonnes of CO_2, 425,000 tonnes of SO_2, 14,000 tonnes of particulates and 6,000 tonnes of black smoke. Sticking with coal cuts gross domestic product by 0.15 percentage points for each of the next five years, according to the Treasury's own model."

Manufacturing industry could be damaged most, when it is suffering from the high levels of the pound and the shrinking economy. Costs will be passed on, which will be inflationary, and we need to know from the report which sectors of business will pay most.

What about high energy users such as the chemical industry, which is already suffering extensive international competition? What about the biggest area of energy waste by business—shops that blow hot air on to the high street and offices, where energy demand has increased by 140 per cent. in the past 12 years as a result of air conditioning?

The report is full of contradictions, with the Government already having tried to rig the market in favour of environmentally unfriendly coal. As the Chancellor will have found when he delivered his speech earlier this month, the CBI is firmly against it. The additional costs of £2 billion a year will be a big tax on industry, at a time when it can least afford to pay it. Even if the recommendations are introduced in a tax-neutral way, they will encourage a further switch away from manufacturing to services.

The one redeeming feature of the Marshall report is the reference to tradeable emissions permits. I hope that the Government will today give a commitment that they will introduce those well before the 2008 date that was suggested by the Kyoto protocol.

We have much to learn from the United States, where emissions trading is well advanced as a market mechanism that promotes cost-effective reductions by allowing countries or companies to trade emissions allowances. Every emitter must have an allowance for each tonne of sulphur dioxide that it emits. So far, acid rain-causing emissions are being cut ahead of schedule, at 50 per cent. of the expected cost. Trading gets incentives right by encouraging cuts where they can be achieved at the lowest cost.

The United States is already working with several developed and developing countries to help to strengthen their capacity to measure emissions and to participate in an emissions-trading system with high standards. In Australia, just the other day, the Sydney futures exchange announced plans to launch a market in permits to emit greenhouse tax. The exchange will operate spot, forward and futures markets in the permits, to be issued under legislation to meet the Kyoto targets. The exchange could become a hub for greenhouse-gas trading in the whole

Pacific region. In this country, British Petroleum has established, off its own bat, a pilot scheme for trading carbon emissions among its subsidiary companies.

Those are all market structures with incentives to promote environmental good practice and to reduce costs. The Government need to get on with a similar system in this country, but we need much more imaginative thinking on linking environment and taxes. On road fuel gases, we need to follow the example of cutting taxes drastically on lead-free petrol that was set by the previous Government. Liquid petroleum gas, which is more environmentally friendly, costs 318.2 ecu for every 1,000 litres in the United Kingdom. The next nearest costs only 201.9 ecu. In France, the cost is 63 ecu. In Sweden and Belgium there is no tax on LPG.

We need a bold move such as that, where taxation as one tool can be effective. We need the rent-a-room scheme, for example—another innovation that was set up by the last Conservative Government. We need to encourage more diverse use of homes on brown-field land before ripping up green-field sites.

On taxation on company cars, we need incentives to encourage more car sharing among people going to work, preferential taxation for company season tickets for public transport travel, disincentives to do more mileage, and proper incentives to convert to LPG—well above and beyond the tinkering in the Budget. There should not be just a blunt increase in fuel, which we know prejudices most the rural driver who has little choice.

There has been another innovative idea in my constituency. Northbrook college has just bought at its own expense and on its own initiative 50 bicycles through a deal with a local bicycle seller. It has made them available free of charge to its students on a year-by-year basis to encourage more cycling to college rather than car use. If the Government were to kick-start such schemes throughout the country, the attractions to colleges, businesses and industries alike would be immense, but they need some kick-starting by the Government.

I agree with the hon. Member for Peterborough. One of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Environmental Audit was to set up a green-tax commission. The Government have gone the route of a Monetary Policy Committee and independence, in certain terms, for the Bank of England. Surely a green-tax commission that is independent of political interference could bring some benefits.

Remember that environmental taxes can mean lower taxes for good practice, not inevitably higher ones to clobber everyone indiscriminately. Decisions on environmental taxes must be made on a case-by-case basis, with due regard to the most effective mix of tax, regulation, voluntary agreements and other instruments.

A few weeks ago, the *New Statesman*, not a Conservative-minded magazine, said:

> "It is hard to detect any sign of commitment by this government to an energy policy that will shift our entire system on to a sustainable footing in the longer term. It has quite a lot to do with a complete lack of enthusiasm for the environment on the part of No. 10."

By contrast, the previous Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), enjoyed a reputation as the most influential Secretary of State for the Environment ever, according to Friends of the Earth. He was responsible for setting up the Environment Agency, for implementing a comprehensive biodiversity plan and for introducing ambitious recycling targets, among many other measures. That followed the "green-blue", effective and practical approach to environmental good practice that was started by Baroness Thatcher.

Conservative Members believe in sensible environmental taxation, but only as part of a range of measures, including the use of sensible regulation that harnesses the power of the market, the promotion of property rights, the creation of a low-tax regime, the favouring of voluntary action and local impact, the trusting of technology, insisting on sound science and working at an international level.

It was Conservative Ministers who set the pace on environmental good practice over many years. I look forward to Labour Ministers starting to show signs of wanting to catch us up soon.

10.5 am

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I join in the congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on securing this important debate. It is a particular pleasure to join her in an Adjournment debate, as I am also a member of the Select Committee on Environmental Audit, and we campaigned for many years together in Kent before her migration to Peterborough. She was a feisty campaigner, and I know that she continues to represent her constituents with the steel with which she approached campaigning in Kent.

I wish to focus on one green taxation issue which has been referred to briefly by my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough and by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton)—taxation on the renovation of empty properties. It is essential that we harmonise value added tax at 5 per cent. for the renovation of long-standing empty properties. It is currently applied at the full rate of 17.5 per cent., yet, for newly built homes on green-field sites, it is applied at a zero rate.

My contribution follows the excellent report on housing by the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. It marked a vital contribution to the White Paper "Planning for the Communities of the Future." In its recommendations, it concurred with the earlier recommendation of Environmental Audit Committee calling for VAT on conversions and renovations to be reduced to as low a level as possible.

The Government's response was positive. They agreed that the current situation was an anomaly. Indeed, since the response, my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning has said that the way in which we apply VAT on old properties and not on new ones is a massive anomaly.

In the response, the Government said:

> "Unifying VAT rates would help to provide a more level playing field for conversions and thus be more consistent with our objectives for accommodating household growth."

However, the report went on to say:

> "There are other economic and technical issues to be considered, such as the impact on House prices and tax administration and the legality under European Law."

I have spoken on the issue in an Adjournment debate and during a 10-minute rule Bill debate. I have tabled an early-day motion, which was signed by nearly

[Mr. Jonathan Shaw]

100 Members from both sides of the House. This morning, I want to deal with some of the economic and technical issues that were mentioned in the Government's response to the report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee.

The environment faces considerable pressure if we are to provide all the homes that we need. Therefore, it is essential that we have a tax framework that encourages us to make more use of what we already have. Unlocking the empty homes is just one way in which to do that, but, to begin with, we need to be clear about how many properties we are talking about.

There are some 800,000 empty homes in England and Wales, a wasted resource. If we put them all together, we would have the sixth largest urban conurbation in the country next to Tyneside; that gives the scale.

In a written answer in June, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said that the cost of reducing VAT for the refurbishment of all those properties to 5 per cent. would be £1.1 billion. In a further reply, my hon. Friend said that the income generated by the introduction of 5 per cent. VAT on all new-build homes would be about £550 million. There is a huge gap.

We need to be clear about the numbers involved, and about what we are defining. In February this year, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions published its annual housing investment programme returns from local authorities, which showed that there were 230,000 long-standing empty homes in the private sector—that is, homes that had been empty for a year or more. It is on that figure that the argument for harmonisation of VAT should focus.

Members of Parliament see such homes in their constituencies year in, year out. They are the homes that blight our inner cities, and they could be put to better use. We could provide decent dwellings for families, protecting the countryside and regenerating our inner cities, and also meet the housing needs of the future. The present VAT arrangements only provide disincentives to builders, as the Government's response recognises.

I am not sure whether the Department is aware of the figures. When, in July, I asked what was the total number of long-standing empty properties, the Department said that it was not available—that it could only provide the number of homes that had been empty for six months, which was 400,000. When I asked the Treasury what would be the cost of reducing VAT on that number to 5 per cent., I was told that it would be £300 million. Eventually, then, we can arrive at an approximate figure of £160 million in loss of revenue for the Treasury if VAT was reduced to 5 per cent. on the 230,000 long-standing empty homes in England. If the introduction of 5 per cent. VAT on new build would generate £550 million, the Treasury would actually be better off.

What about administration? I understand the concern about fraud, but systems are already in place. As I have said, local authorities have information on empty properties, which they are required to provide as part of their council tax returns. They could provide exemption certificates for the properties identified.

European law is clearly a difficult hurdle, but I am confident. The Treasury team won the argument on the reduction of VAT on fuel, to which we were committed, and I think that they could win this argument too. Given the way in which VAT exemptions are currently being applied to new build, it is difficult to argue that they are consistent with the criteria. Article 17 of the sixth directive allows VAT exemptions provided that they are maintained for

"clearly definable social reasons and for the benefit of the final consumer".

It follows that the current VAT arrangements allow a millionaire's new home to be built on a green-field site for "social reasons". It is certainly of "benefit", but it is not for social reasons in housing terms.

The conversion of a barn is zero-rated. How many families in housing need were rehoused in such conversions in 1994, the year in which that exemption was introduced? Just one.

In Medway, our empty homes strategy enabled us to bring 100 homes back into use, working in partnership with housing associations. Social landlords are not exempt from VAT, but, with harmonisation, we could have provided 15 more homes for families on low incomes. There are some 3,000 empty homes in my borough, which could make a significant contribution to the requirement in the local plan for Medway to provide 13,000 homes.

We should also consider the matter of house prices. The average value of arable land is £3,000 per acre, which can increase to £400,000 per acre when planning permission is given. There is plenty of room for a modest 5 per cent. increase.

I believe that harmonising VAT on long-standing empty properties would provide the building industry with the necessary incentives, protecting our countryside and regenerating our inner cities. I am confident that the Treasury team will examine the possibilities closely, working in conjunction with the DETR, so that we can improve the environment and provide a sustainable taxation base for housing.

10.14 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on securing this welcome debate. I believe that environmental taxation could underpin a huge reform of our tax system, but such a reform will require imagination and courage.

In February, the Treasury promised such a new approach to environmental taxes. It echoed that promise in a recent pre-Budget report, saying that the Government were

"committed to exploring the scope for using taxes"

in their sustainable development strategy. A welcome process of consultation has been embarked on, not least through the Marshall report, but so far little action has been taken, and no timetable has been drawn up.

What concerns me most is the lack of vision in regard to the place of environmental taxation in the overall tax system, and how it should be introduced. So far, we have seen no more than a continuation of the Conservative Government's record. Ad hoc increases in what are described as environmental taxes have been seen as tax-raising rather than as tax-changing—in my view, the latter is the fundamental principle of environmental taxation. There has been an increase in the fuel tax escalator, but no commensurate cut in other taxes. There

has been an increase in the landfill tax, but, unlike the original introduction of the tax, that increase involves no hypothecated cut in another tax. Previously, employers' national insurance was cut, and that was seen as a benefit of the introduction of that "green" tax. If the process continues, we risk destroying any public support for, or belief in, environmental taxation.

Mr. Loughton: How does what the hon. Gentleman has said tally with the last Government's 25 per cent. cut in duty on LPG, and the fact that the landfill tax was introduced with a compensatory allowance for a reduction in employers' national insurance contributions? Those were not overall tax-raising measures.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to what I said about the landfill tax. I said exactly that. As for his first point, the last Government raised £25 billion in increased fuel duties; nothing like that was spent on the small cuts in duty on LPG and unleaded fuel. I welcome those cuts, but there was no deal. The last Government raised an extra £25 billion net through increases in fuel taxation. That is why I believe that we should return to first principles.

Environmental taxation provides incentives for the continuous improvement of environmental performance. It thus introduces a market-led mechanism to find cost-effective ways of securing change. That is one clear benefit, but taxation is not an alternative to regulation. Regulation lays the base: it underpins the level of what can be allowed. Taxation must come on top of that. It can raise revenue to pay for improvements, and I welcome the Government's saying that they may introduce road pricing to finance better local transport. When charges are introduced to provide a clear benefit, it is appropriate to use the revenue for such investment.

As for the wider issue of general environmental taxation, I believe that, to win support, it requires a larger vision. Income, jobs and added value are all heavily taxed, although we want higher incomes, more jobs and more added value. Instead, we should be taxing pollution and the excessive use of resources. We all talk about that—the hon. Member for Peterborough rightly did so herself—but we need to strike a genuine bargain with the public. We need to make it clear that, when we talk of environmental taxation, we are talking not of a general process of tax increases dressed up in a green gown, but of radical reform of the tax system.

I can give two examples that demonstrate the importance of such reform. The first is the petrol price escalator, on which, as I have said, the last Government raised £25 billion, and on which the new Government plan to raise some £9 billion. However, neither the previous nor the current Government expressed a clear commitment to a substantive shift in taxation alongside those escalators. So far, Governments have been protected from real public anger about the escalators because raw material prices have been falling, so that there has been little real-terms impact at the pump. As raw material prices have been falling, the escalators have had nothing like the impact implied by their size. However, the situation may change if oil price increases reach the pump.

Given the massive scale of revenues, there is a real opportunity to do something that will not only help to maintain public supp for the process and match the rhetoric of taxing bads rather than goods, but emphasise the principle that the problem with car ownership is excessive use—specifically excessive use of fuel—and not vehicle ownership itself. For most people—certainly in rural constituencies such as my own—vehicle ownership is a necessary part of daily life. However, very often, people can use more fuel-efficient vehicles and think again about making the very large proportion of very short journeys—which is where the fuel escalator comes in.

If the issue is vehicle use and not vehicle ownership, we should stop taxing ownership as such. I therefore believe that a part of the income that we are raising by such means should be used to abolish vehicle excise duty for all but the most gas-guzzling vehicles. Although there is a principle that we may want to provide a direct disincentive against choosing ownership of the most gas-guzzling vehicles, the issue for the great majority of people is use and not ownership. Abolition of vehicle excise duty would be a strong signal to that effect.

The Government are consulting on vehicle excise duty changes, but we have to face the fact that the difference between £150 a year and £100 a year—as the Chancellor suggested last year—is unlikely to change people's habits when deciding which vehicle to buy. In the context of car ownership, that sum—although it will undoubtedly be pocketed with cheer—is too small.

Abolishing vehicle excise duty could make a real difference in people's decisions on which vehicles to buy. Most significantly, abolition could make a difference in which vehicles fleet buyers decide to buy. We know that most larger-engine vehicles were purchased originally by the company car market and sold subsequently into the second-hand market. Those vehicles' lack of fuel economy is discounted by the low prices that they achieve on the secondhand market. Buyers of the cars therefore compensate themselves in advance. Vehicle excise duty would be a direct way of dealing with that situation. If we do not do something about such situations, we shall lose basic public support for the principle of environmental taxation.

The second issue that I should like to deal with is the carbon tax and energy taxation. The Marshall report was very good news on the issue. Given Lord Marshall's background as an extremely experienced business man in an industry in which fuel costs comprise a significant part of overall costs—I do not think that anyone had thought of him as a great environmentalist before he was appointed to his new role—it was extremely significant that his report argued for energy taxation.

One conclusion of the Marshall report was:

"there probably is a role for a tax if businesses of all sizes and from all sectors are to contribute to improved energy efficiency".

Although that sentence sounds rather full of caveats, the report goes much further, arguing comprehensively for the introduction of energy taxation. The point—it is often lost—that is being made in that quotation is that Marshall does not believe that a trading system, which is the explored alternative, would be an effective mechanism to embrace all business. He believes that such a system could apply to the largest businesses—although it would be complex and difficult to introduce—but could not be introduced for all business. He therefore favours taxation over the alternatives that have been examined, and that is an important part of his conclusions.

[Mr. Taylor]

I have a couple of important reservations about the matter. The first is that Lord Marshall suggests that such taxation should cover all energy and not only carbon energies. Taxation would therefore apply as much to energy from renewable sources as it does to energy from the most polluting sources. He said that he had reached the conclusion that it would not be possible to differentiate between the types of energy, because there would not be such taxation of domestic fuel.

Liberal Democrats have argued that such taxation should be applied across the board precisely for those reasons, and could be introduced now, at a time of falling energy prices—so that energy prices are at least kept roughly at current levels and are not expected to fall, thereby reducing incentives to invest in future energy savings. That would be one solution to the dilemma.

The Government will have to find a way in which they can target carbon fuels without imposing a general energy tax. If they cannot, the tax would fall at the first—environmental—hurdle of justification. That is precisely where VAT on fuel came a cropper for the previous Government. Not only was that tax self-evidently targeted at the non-polluting fuels: it was a financial tax-grab rather than part of a tax change. There was no big tax cut to go with it.

Lord Marshall made my next point, which is that revenues raised from an energy tax must be recycled into other tax cuts. I believe that such a proposal is likely to receive as much support from the business sector as it is from ordinary people. At the general election, Liberal Democrats fought on a policy of cutting VAT and employer's national insurance, to boost jobs and to help those who pay extra energy bills by cutting their other bills.

We now suggest being more direct and using the revenue gradually to raise income tax thresholds so that £10,000 is tax-free for every individual. That would be a very direct incentive for jobs, income, earning and hard work. It would also be direct compensation for any extra costs that people may pay, more than outweighing any increase in domestic fuel costs—which are nevertheless falling.

Those examples show clearly not only the role that environmental taxation can play but the pitfalls surrounding such taxation. The biggest single message must be one of vision, by placing the role of environmental taxation clearly in the context of reform of the wider tax system. Such taxation will not have public support if it is seen as a back door way of raising taxes—which the Chancellor can claim are good ones, whereas everyone realises that they are simply paying more. Such taxation has to be part of a process of tax reform. If the Government do that, they will make it possible to have a truly reforming series of Budgets in this Parliament.

10.26 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on securing this important debate. I congratulate also my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) specifically on his campaign to highlight the differences between VAT treatment of empty and new-build properties.

The Government, and particularly my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, have been enormously courageous in asking Lord Marshall to draw up a report on the business use of energy and possible tax measures to reduce business energy use. Like other hon. Members, I look forward to hearing the comments of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on the Treasury's thinking on the Marshall report. As I, too, am a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, I should like to take this opportunity to welcome him to one of our meetings, so that he can tell us in detail how the Government will make progress on the energy tax agenda.

I shall concentrate this speech on measures that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury might take to encourage the renewable energy sector. The Government have already taken some important initiatives in supporting renewables. The Government's reversal of the previous Administration's cuts in renewables research and development spending—which they had planned to eliminate entirely by 2005—is very welcome. Investment in renewable technologies is essential for lowering their cost, and for ensuring that Britain will be in a position to reap the benefits of the global expansion in renewables, not only creating employment in the United Kingdom but realising the huge benefits of preventing climate change.

Other fiscal measures and tax incentives to stimulate the levering of private finance into the renewables industry could be usefully considered by the Treasury in helping us to meet our targets. The non-fossil fuel obligation has been successful in reducing costs of renewables, but many non-governmental organisations and the International Energy Agency have recommended that other measures to develop the green electricity market—both to complement the NFFO and to encourage the commercial take-up of energy generated by renewable sources—should be taken.

Some electricity companies offer a green tariff for those willing to pay extra for renewable energy. That may attract some subscribers, but I fear that they will be in a minority. It will be a significant time before sufficient funds are generated for substantial investment in renewables.

Countries such as the Netherlands have successfully levered private finance into renewable energy through simple tax incentives. Since the introduction of a green tax break in 1995, almost £200 million of private finance has been invested in funds established by Dutch banks for environmental projects. The majority of investment has been in renewables, although there have also been small investments in organic farming, eco-offices and the development of natural habitats and country estates. Similar tax breaks have been advocated by the New Economics Foundation and others to stimulate investment in initiatives, including environmental initiatives, to tackle social and financial exclusion. Other Treasury Ministers are considering such proposals.

The interest or dividends on the green funds are exempt from income tax, allowing the bank to pass on favourable terms to the investor and the project being financed. The initiative has been greeted with considerable enthusiasm by the Dutch public and financial institutions. The certificates of the first green interest fund issued by Rabo-Robeco bank to the value of £150 million were sold out in nine days. The ABN-AMRO fund for a £25 million wind farm was similarly popular.

The green funds have succeeded by harnessing the public's desire to invest their savings in an environmentally sound and ethical way while still receiving an acceptable return. They have also provided much-needed capital for renewable energy projects, which could not have been secured through public expenditure or other means. The green funds are carefully regulated through the Dutch central bank. Proposals by project developers are assessed by the Ministry of Housing and Environment. The initiative has already resulted in 25 new energy projects, mostly on wind energy.

There is a fund for investing in wind power in Britain, established by the Triodos bank, but it is on a small scale compared with the Netherlands and does not have the advantages of the Netherlands tax system. My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry has welcomed the fund as an example of extending community involvement in the planning and ownership of green energy schemes.

We must carry the public with us if we are to achieve our renewables target. The Dutch system has so far favoured large-scale projects, but attention must be given to promoting renewable energy at community level. Tax incentives for communities that want to invest in renewable technology should be actively promoted. It has been demonstrated in other countries that, where communities have a stake in renewable facilities—such as through a co-operatively owned structure—and can see the financial benefits, they are more positive about the development of renewables. Tax incentives for community-based renewable projects would help to stimulate interest in, and take-up of, renewable energy, particularly if any surplus electricity could be taken by the grid at a reasonable price.

A tax incentive scheme could be a useful complementary measure to the NFFO. It would help us to meet our renewables and carbon dioxide targets and ensure that Britain was at the forefront of the development of the renewables sector. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will give careful consideration to such a scheme.

10.33 am

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): I congratulate the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on securing the debate. I should like to concentrate on why it is so important.

I recently became a trustee of an international body that is concerned with the crisis in the world's fisheries. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that 60 per cent. of the world's fisheries require urgent management, and that 30 to 40 per cent. of them are about to be exhausted. It is essential that Governments take a lead and mean what they say. This should not be an issue of party politics. The previous Government passed on a good record on the environment to the new Government. However, more needs to be done. The link between the environment and taxation is crucial. I agree with the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) that a serious tax reform must consider the role of the environment.

The Deputy Prime Minister recently returned from the conference on climate change in Buenos Aires. He went out with a great deal to say and high hopes, but most of us know that he returned with very little agreed. One of the major agreements was that 146 unresolved items would be deferred to a future climate change meeting.

The world must face up to the crisis. Countries such as the United Kingdom must take a lead and the Government must take action. The Government have shown a spirit of wanting to get on with addressing the problems of the environment. There has been a great deal of consultation. Indeed, as Charles Secrett of Friends of the Earth recently said, the Government's motto is fast becoming "Carry on Consulting". Lord Marshall's recent report on business energy use and the proposal for an energy tax is a start, but, for all the criticisms that might be levelled against the report, the Chancellor's response was that we must have more consultation.

Some of the problems require not just consultation, but action. The Marine Stewardship Council came into play because Unilever and the World Wide Fund for Nature put up about £1 million for urgent research on the state of the world's fisheries. That was not done with whole-hearted benevolence, but there was philanthropy involved. Unilever owns Bird's Eye. It realised that, in 10 years, there will be no more cod for its fish fingers. It is a long time since an 18th-century cabin boy could report that he was unable to get the boat out from the shore into the Baltic sea for three days because of the shoals of fish. Today, he would be lucky to find a fish in the Baltic.

The MSC wants to launch two major projects: one on the state of Alaska salmon and the second on South African hake. Those fisheries will soon be exhausted, but it is difficult for such bodies to find the funding that they need. There are suggestions of hypothecated taxation or the creation of an independent resource such as an environmental investment bank from which bodies such as the MSC or the Forest Stewardship Council could draw. Action is essential.

The Government's pre-Budget report has been criticised by many green bodies, including Friends of the Earth, because it fails to make core links between the environment and taxation. One of the projects mentioned in the pre-Budget report involves changes to vehicle excise duty. We have heard that there is to be a cut of £50 for cars with low emissions—a total incentive from the Treasury of £1.7 billion or £1.8 billion. However, we can guess that the Government will increase vehicle excise duty on other cars, which will net the Exchequer the same amount of money.

What will happen to that money? Will it be specifically linked to innovation in new technologies to protect the environment? Will it be made available to bodies such as the Marine Stewardship Council, which could use it to get on with the crucial work of certification, which has been agreed around the world? It has a set of principles that the whole world will sign up to, including the industries and the retailers involved.

The problem is that we cannot get the money to progress to the next stage. This is an opportunity for the Government. The environment needs to be at the heart of the economy, because we are talking about a common inheritance, as John Stuart Mill recognised. It should be at the heart of a civilised society to recognise its duty to husband the environment.

If the Government and the Chancellor are serious about the environment, they should use the change in vehicle excise duty as a way of helping the environment rather than a way of raising taxes. I am glad to see the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in his place, because his

[Mr. Shaun Woodward]

presence is a recognition of the importance of the debate. Will he consider ensuring that the money is not used simply as a way of raising taxes for general revenue purposes, but will be hypothecated in some form, and find its way into environmental concerns, to help bodies such as the Marine Stewardship Council and the Forestry Stewardship Council?

The tax changes should not simply penalise people who drive cars, they should change behaviour. That is at the heart of the issue. The problem is that changes to vehicle excise duty will probably hit people in rural communities hard, while people in urban communities go on driving their cars, and congestion, emissions and pollution continue. The crucial challenge on the environment and taxation is to find a meaningful way in which to encourage people, industry and businesses to change their behaviour. That is at the heart of the debate, and a civilised society must think about it.

Sustainable development is not a slogan, but a crucial task for the Government to take on. I urge the Chief Secretary to tell the House that sustainable development is not mere rhetoric but will be translated into policy, and that the Treasury will firmly underline that fact.

10.40 am

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): The hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) has chosen well in selecting this important subject for debate, but she has also chosen a minefield for the Government. Several of the mines have already been trodden on by Labour Members, so we look forward to the response to the debate by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) in saying that sustainable development should be a core aim in any civilised society. The Conservatives have always believed that tax measures have an important part to play in delivering environmental aims. For instance, we used tax measures to achieve the successful switch from leaded to unleaded petrol.

Another example that has already been mentioned is the landfill tax, which we introduced, and which was designed to deter and tax the dumping of waste in landfill sites. Crucially, we used the revenue—nearly half a billion pounds a year—to cut employers' national insurance contributions by an equivalent annual sum. By taxing pollution, we cut the taxes on employment.

We can contrast that with what the present Chancellor of the Exchequer has done. He has announced a 43 per cent. increase in the standard rate of landfill tax, but the money will not be recycled into industry or used to reduce the costs of employment. Instead, it will simply be bagged by the Treasury for general expenditure. Taxation comes first, and the environment a poor second. It is therefore not surprising that, in March, the director of Friends of the Earth, Mr. Secrett, said:

"Last week's Budget was unforgivable. At a stroke, Gordon Brown broke the Government's manifesto promise to put 'the environment at the heart of policymaking'."

We shall undoubtedly hear several ideas from the Government about aggregate taxation, taxing water pollution and so on—but those ideas were first announced in July 1997. Since then, they have put up taxes 17 times and revolutionised the British constitution, but they still have not introduced any of those environmental ideas.

Rather than trying to gaze into a crystal ball, we are now entitled to examine the Government's record, and we see that little has been done for the environment, while great damage has been done to industry and commerce. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) made a good point about fuel taxation. The Library has calculated that the additional fuel escalator and future tax increases in future Budgets will add £9 billion to the costs of transport and motoring during this Parliament. That will not do anything for the environment; it will simply raise revenue.

The Government have a problem with carbon dioxide reduction, because they are stopping the development of any more gas-burning power stations, and nuclear power will start to be phased out soon, as the older Magnox reactors are decommissioned. However, imposing a burden on the motorist as a substitute will not do the trick. Indeed, the Budget documents make it clear that, by 2010, reductions due to the fuel duty increases will amount to only 1.7 million tonnes of carbon a year, compared with an annual emission of 206 million tonnes. After 12 years of fuel tax increases, the benefit will be an 0.8 per cent. reduction in carbon emissions at best. That is a ludicrously expensive way of achieving not very much. A fraction of that money used in other ways to reduce carbon emissions or to control pollution would bring a far greater return.

The Government are not only hitting the motorist, in rural areas and elsewhere, but damaging the haulage industry—a subject on which the House had a good debate last week. The whole of manufacturing industry is being hit, and productivity undermined, by huge and continuing cost increases. The Government lecture manufacturing industry about productivity. That is their new excuse for economic problems—lazy workers not doing enough at plant level. Yet, at the same time, they are imposing wave upon wave of extra regulations and tax increases on the firms in which people work.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I have only a few minutes and I must complete the points that I want to make, most of which are in response to what has been said in the debate.

Despite their declared belief in tax harmonisation in Europe, the Government have made diesel fuel the most expensive in Europe—if that is untrue, I hope that the Minister will correct me now. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury sits on a committee dealing with unfair tax competition in the European Union, which means increasing United Kingdom taxation where it is below continental levels. Yet, although the Government have unquestioned discretion on fuel taxation, successive Budgets have widened the gap between our fuel taxes and those on the continent.

That is not harmonisation but the economics of the madhouse. The Government are making a bad situation worse. French lorry drivers come over here with full tanks to take freight round the United Kingdom, while British lorries fill up on the continent. We are exporting not only jobs but revenue.

Smuggling in Northern Ireland leads to a loss of about £100 million in revenue every year, because of the tax differentials across the border. When I asked the Treasury

about that, the answer was that it had made no estimate. The Government think that they can estimate carbon reductions in 2010, but they have no idea how much revenue is lost today. Those are the finances of the madhouse.

Instead of making things better, the Government have announced that things will get worse, because they have signalled that successive Budgets will continue to increase fuel taxes year on year. The damaging differential between our fuel tax rates and those on the continent will widen.

There is another threat, which is mentioned in Lord Marshall's report on a possible energy tax. I am not impressed by the report, which has a curious omission. A Government document on climate change says that air transport is the fastest growing source of carbon dioxide emissions. However, aviation fuel is not taxed at all. The document by Lord Marshall is silent on that sector. I find that surprising, because Lord Marshall is, of course, the chairman of British Airways and has a great deal of knowledge and expertise in that sector. He might have been expected to tell us what should be done to bring those emissions under control, instead of dishing it out to the poor old haulage industry. The report is partial and incomplete, and it will, if we are not careful, impose huge additional costs, making British industry less competitive and driving investment away.

What we see is not the use of taxation to deliver environmental goals—that, perhaps, we could support—but the use of the environment to justify huge tax increases. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury is about to reply, and I welcome that. He is still relatively new to his job. Let him use his influence to reverse this high-tax strategy, which has failed. It is doing very little for the environment, it is undermining businesses and it is costing jobs.

In this area at least, can the Government make a start on bringing their rhetoric into line with their performance—or, perhaps, more accurately, start to bring what they do in practice into line with their pre-election rhetoric?

10.50 am

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Byers): The Government welcome today's debate on the environmental effects of taxation. I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on securing this debate. I was interested to hear about the Peterborough energy audit and the valuable role played by Perkins Engines in that initiative. My hon. Friend has been a doughty campaigner in Peterborough and elsewhere on environmental matters.

I also welcome the several members of the Environmental Audit Committee who are in the Chamber. I received a kind invitation from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) to attend one of the Committee's meetings in the near future, and I am due to do so in December. I look forward to that with some trepidation, given the quality of speeches in today's debate.

As we face the century ahead, we need a focused programme of environmental modernisation—a programme that is not simply about environmental protection, but one that can achieve objectives that are central to the Government's policies. Those policies are clearly set out in the Government's approach to sustainable development, and are based on four broad objectives: first, the maintenance of high and stable levels of growth and employment; secondly, the effective protection of the environment; thirdly, prudent use of natural resources; fourthly, social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): In the context of the Government's commitment to sustainable development, will my right hon. Friend agree to look again at the code for fiscal stability? Is he aware that, in the recent version of the code which came out with the pre-Budget report, there is a single reference to the word "environment"—and that is the economic environment? Does he agree that it is worth looking at the five criteria used in the code and perhaps including a sixth—sustainability? Would that not be a way of effectively locking in fiscal policy with the Government's commitment to putting the environment at the heart of government?

Mr. Byers: There are a number of ways in which we can address those environmental concerns. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that, early next year, the Government will publish our strategy on sustainable development. That will outline our aims, as well as measures already in place, and will highlight what further action might be undertaken to achieve our objectives. Those objectives will make it clear that we believe that economic development must take place in a sustainable way to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, both now and for future generations.

We recognise that what matters is not just the quality but the level of growth. The debate has shown that the tax system clearly has an important role in underpinning sustainable development. Our strategic approach was outlined in our statement of intent on environmental taxation, published at the time of the Budget in July 1997. How and what the Government tax sends clear signals about which economic activities we believe should be encouraged or discouraged. Just as work should be encouraged through the tax system, environmental pollution should be discouraged.

I listened with interest to several hon. Members—including my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough and the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton)—who mentioned the need to establish a green tax commission, something that was proposed by the Environmental Audit Committee in its response to the pre-Budget report. A number of European countries have such a commission, but the experience is variable—it works well in some countries, and not so well in others. We are keeping under review the possibility of establishing such a commission. We do not want duplication. There are many organisations doing valuable work in this area, and we shall need to look carefully to see whether a green tax commission can play a valuable role.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) referred to the harmonisation of VAT on the renovation of empty properties. We keep all tax matters under review—that is the nature of any Government. It will be for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to decide whether any

[Mr. Byers]

changes will be made in that direction. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will look with interest at my hon. Friend's comments.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) raised the two main issues, in my view. First, he referred to the difficulty caused by the Government consulting so much. We make no apologies for that. This is one of the areas where we need to take people with us and to explain the direction in which we wish to go. By doing that, we can command broad and popular support for our proposals. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman referred to hypothecation. We judge each case on its merits, and we will look carefully at each proposal. Once again, we have noted with interest the hon. Gentleman's specific proposals this morning.

It would be a mistake to believe that taxation is the only way in which we can address environmental issues. Clearly, a key part can be played by taxes, but they are not always the solution to every environmental problem. Environmental taxation must meet the general test of good taxation. It must be well designed to meet its objectives without undesirable side effects. It must keep deadweight compliance and administrative costs to a minimum, and care must be taken with regard to implications for the competitive position of UK companies in international markets.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham was critical of the Government's spending commitments, which he felt did not address sufficiently environmental concerns. I wish to give the House an example of how the spending—£40 billion for schools and hospitals over the next three years, with which the Conservative party disagrees—can be used to address environmental concerns.

The House will know that the Government have started a large-scale programme of capital investment in our schools and £30 million has been allocated for improvements in energy management, including the replacement of heating systems. Decisions have just been taken to allocate to some 891 schools some of the money. It is estimated that they will achieve average savings on fuel costs of 20 per cent., with further savings on maintenance costs. This should, in total, amount to more than £2 million in savings a year which can be ploughed back into the individual schools. It is not merely pupils who will benefit. There will be a reduction of 44,000 tonnes in the level of carbon dioxide emissions due to the programme, which is the equivalent of 23 million average car journeys, or a reduction of 24,700 in the number of cars—a real contribution that can be made.

The Government will consider the issues in the round. We will study taxation and other measures that can be taken to improve our environment. We intend to do that with people—to consult and move forward on an ambitious agenda that will be based, not on dogma but on putting the national interest first. On the basis of those principles, I commend our approach to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We now move on to the debate on the pig and livestock industry.

Pig and Livestock Industry

10.59 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject, and I am sure that hon. Members will forgive me if I start with livestock before moving to the pig sector. I am also grateful for the support that I have received from a number of my colleagues, including some who are unable to be here but who have contacted me on the subject.

The debate is timely, coming only two days after the announcement by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of an aid package. Farming is in crisis, and it is the worst depression in the industry since the 1930s. Some farmers are leaving the industry because they cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel, and some are leaving because they have no choice as they are going bankrupt. The majority of farmers are staying in the industry, but getting poorer. Any savings that they have been able to build up through a number of years of hard and long toil have been eaten away and, for some, overdrafts are increasing daily to dangerous levels.

Put simply, the prices paid for animals have decreased dramatically in the past two years. In some cases, farmers are paid less for their animals now than they were 20 years ago. I do not know whether any other industry is facing similar difficulties. Part of the problem is that consumers do not appreciate the fact that that is happening. One farmer told me that 18 months ago he was paid between £1.10 and £1.20 a kilo for his cattle, but now it is between 75p and 80p. For lamb, the price used to be £1.10 to £1.30 and now it is 65p a kilo.

However, consumers visiting the larger supermarkets do not appreciate the fact that such dramatic falls have taken place. Farmers are being bled dry and consumers are being ripped off. Current supermarket prices are a conspiracy to clobber the producer and cheat the shopper. It is about time a new deal was struck for British farmers and consumers, and if our supermarkets are not going to do that job, who will? Lower prices in the shops would at least encourage increased consumption by more people. That is not the answer to all the industry's problems, but one can imagine the anger and frustration of farmers whose incomes have declined dramatically in the past two years when they see others maintaining or even increasing their margins.

The National Farmers Union has predicted that incomes will fall by a further 67 per cent. this year. Clearly, the situation is not tenable. For farmers to be told that aid will help them in the short term is no comfort when the crisis is long term—it has been going on for two years for many farmers. Obviously, banks have become concerned and relationships between farmers and bankers are strained. The banks will not carrying on lending when they see no prospect of a return.

I understand that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be meeting bankers to discuss the farming crisis, for which I am grateful. Perhaps the Minister can tell us today what his right hon. Friend will say to the bankers when they meet. What fresh hope of an improvement in the plight of farmers can be given to bankers to help them sustain farmers through this crisis?

The majority of my contribution will concentrate on pig farming, but I wanted to put that part of the sector into the context of an industry that is reeling. The £120 million

of aid announced on Monday is better than nothing, but that is as much as I can say about it. Will the Minister ensure that that money gets through to farmers as quickly as possible, because those with overdrafts see their bank managers weekly and will need to put it in the bank as soon as possible?

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most noticeable features absent from the announcement on Monday was that, whereas £48.3 million is being made available for the beef industry, not one penny is to go to the pig and poultry industries? Does he not think that that is a disgrace?

Mr. Evans: The pig industry has a distinct problem, but the crisis is hitting all sectors of farming. While the Government are targeting certain areas, the pig and poultry industries, which are also reeling from the same sort of problems as the rest of the industry, are getting no support. My hon. Friend is right about that, and I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about the rest of the sector in his reply.

Ben Gill of the NFU stated that the £120 million will

"act as a short-term safety net for some farmers teetering on the brink of financial collapse."

Also, interest rates have increased and the extra costs that farmers have incurred as a result more than swallow up the aid package announced on Monday. Frankly, for many farmers the aid package is not only too little but too late. We need a new approach to the industry—one that will give it greater security for the future—and a new attitude on the part of the Government.

The common agricultural policy is a disastrous method of taking money off the taxpayer in large amounts and ensuring that, in some cases, farmers have to live on less than the proposed minimum wage, which is not sustainable. We know that there are inefficiencies within the European Union. Only yesterday, we heard that there have been about £3 billion-worth of inefficiencies/fraud and that the gravy train is speeding out of control. Something needs to be done to deal with the problem, and capital is needed urgently, in particular because the EU is to increase in size and some of the countries that are about to join are enormous producers of agricultural products, which will impact on United Kingdom farming.

Farmers are reeling from lower prices, but they are also swamped by paperwork. There are new rules and regulations and new welfare standards to obey. Costs are being heaped upon them, with Meat Hygiene Service charges the final insult for many. One farmer told me yesterday that he knows of an abattoir owner who has nine employees at the abattoir, plus seven people from the MHS and two vets to inspect what is going on. Clearly that is not sustainable either. All those costs are passed on. When will those escalating costs to farmers and the industry be controlled?

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Some Norfolk farmers told me last week that a number of inspectors are recruited from eastern Europe and some do not speak English properly. One inspector is from Hungary. This is not an insult to them as people, but obviously the communications problems need to be solved.

Mr. Evans: There is certainly a communications problem, but it may not be between the Hungarian inspector and the people with whom he works. The communications breakdown is between the farmers and those working in the industry and the Government. We need some control of costs so that farmers and people in the industry have some security for the future. For instance, will the Minister tell me whether our continental neighbours face similar costs to those heaped on our industry by the Meat Hygiene Service? Do they have the same sort of hygiene service and similar numbers of inspectors and vets in their abattoirs as in the UK? If not, why not?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): The veterinary inspection procedures derive from a European Union directive and are exactly the same in other member states. Eastern European and other EU vets are working in our abattoirs because of recruitment problems in the United Kingdom, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that all of them speak English.

Mr. Evans: That is reassuring. As the Minister knows, all EU directives are enforced in this country—everything that we sign up to, we obey—but there is widespread scepticism in the industry about whether other EU countries would know an EU directive if they fell over one. The Minister, with his colleagues, must ensure that no competitive advantage is given to our EU neighbours.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend is more than generous in giving way twice. Is he aware that the standards of inspection in many European countries are much lower? In France, for example, only a vet is required to attend, whereas in this country a vet and a meat processor are needed. Moreover, in many European countries, inspection is paid for by the Government, whereas in this country the industry pays 100 per cent. of the costs. That is straightforward evidence from the Meat and Livestock Commission of the difference between European countries and the UK.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful for that contribution, which demonstrates the disparity between Britain and Europe. If British farmers and the British industry have to meet all the costs when farmers in other European countries do not, our neighbours will have a competitive advantage in the export market, and British farmers will suffer. That must be sorted out as quickly as possible.

The pig industry has been largely ignored in the current crisis. I saw a photograph of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in his wellies on a farm in Devon—he was surrounded by pigs. That was a great photo opportunity for him, and no doubt the pig farmers there bent his ear about the problems that the industry faces.

I pay tribute to Greg Smith and Philip Edge, two pig farmers in my constituency, whom I consulted in preparing for this debate. Their plight is typical. We must remember that the crisis is affecting small family businesses—individuals whose families have, in some cases, worked for generations in the industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) said, of the £120 million that was announced on Monday, the pig industry will receive nothing.

Mr. Morley: It did not ask for anything.

Mr. Evans: The Minister says that it did not ask for anything, but it is asking for help. Only a few weeks ago,

[Mr. Evans]

I attended the Meat Livestock Commission breakfast at which he said: "Of course we know that the pig industry is in deep crisis, but how marvellous it is that it does not get any support." That is like watching a ship going down, not sending any support vessels to help it and, when the ship disappears, saying: "How marvellous. It did not ask for any support." The problem is that it did not receive any support.

Mr. Morley: There are no EU mechanisms on subsidies—as the hon. Gentleman said, the pig industry has never received subsidies. I emphasise that, although the pig industry has asked for a range of measures, which I shall outline, it has never requested direct subsidies.

Mr. Evans: That may be so, but we must recognise that the industry is reeling from the same pressures as the rest of agriculture. It is pointless saying that the sector has not asked for any subsidies; it is asking for help and a range of measures irrespective of subsidies. Farmers in neighbouring countries do not have to face the costs that are being heaped on the British industry.

Pig farmers are deeply concerned about the price that they are receiving for their products. The other day, *Farmers' Weekly* said:

"Despite Brussels' recent decision to raise export subsidies, UK prices have continued to slip and are now less than half the cost of production. The number of casualties is mounting, most notably this week with the bankruptcy of Scotland's biggest pig farmer, Arthur Simmers. But the pain is not being shared equally and supermarkets continue to profit from the crisis. Since the market peaked in June last year, producer prices have slumped by a massive 55 per cent. Retail values over the same period, however, have dropped by just 13 per cent."

Mr. Keith Simpson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. He is no doubt aware that Norfolk produces more than one tenth of all this country's pigs; it is estimated by local experts that the county has lost £58 million in the past 11 months because of the crisis in the industry. A farmer told me last week that his family business had lost £7,500. We do not want the Minister to give descriptions of the problems; we want answers to the specific questions that I know my hon. Friend will raise.

Mr. Evans: Norfolk is an important area for pig production, but the whole of the United Kingdom is affected. I have received a letter from the Ulster Farmers Union, whose members are also reeling from the crisis. All sectors of agriculture and all parts of the United Kingdom are affected.

The strong pound has had an impact on exports. Because of the difficulties in Asia and Russia, two markets that the EU has traditionally supplied, there have been many lost contracts, which has led to an over-supply. Moreover, many farmers in the UK and elsewhere have been increasing production to try to make up for the lost money, but that depresses prices even further.

Another problem is the welfare rules. We support the ending of stalls and tethers, but we must recognise that that has led to further costs for the industry. One of my farmers told me that he had had to spend £35,000 on new production methods for his pigs, but that sum is probably at the lower end of the range—some farmers will have had to spend much more than that. Animal welfare policies are being implemented in the United Kingdom well before they are in the rest of the European Union, with which we have to compete.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The capital investment that my hon. Friend mentions may, on paper, become an asset, but it is hard to do anything with it, as it is not transferable or flexible. It is often said that farmers have a lot of land and capital, but that capital is not very useful in a time of crisis.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The capital investment is not an asset when the pig farmer has had to borrow the money and now has to pay it back, with interest charges, as prices for his product fall. The welfare standards are tremendous, but I wish that they were met elsewhere, so that farmers in other European Union countries did not have a competitive advantage. What message on welfare standards will the Minister give to pig farmers? Will he ensure that pigmeat coming into this country meets the same standards as pigmeat that is produced here?

Mr. Morley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Evans: I see the Minister nodding. We are giving our European Union neighbours, such as Holland, Denmark and France, a competitive advantage. It may be four or five years before some of those countries abandon stalls and tethers, in which time they will be able to kick British pigmeat out of the market and dominate it themselves. In that time, our farmers will go out of business, and it is very difficult for those starting up to make any impact.

Let us not give our neighbours a competitive advantage. We must fight for welfare standards throughout the whole of the European Union. If we are too far ahead of the game, we will do the British industry no service.

Mr. Morley: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's serious point about welfare standards, but I do not agree that our competitors who do not have the same standards as ours have a marketing advantage. The British Retail Consortium's recent announcements about the sourcing of fresh pigmeat and bacon, and about extending the schemes to other processed products, show that our quality assurance schemes and buying practices give our producers a welfare and a marketing advantage over our competitors, as demonstrated by the fact that some of our continental competitors are voluntarily applying the same standards.

Mr. Evans: It remains to be seen what competitive advantage British pig farmers will gain, as 30 per cent. of all bacon goes to catering concerns, which will continue to go on price: if it is cheaper, they will buy bacon from Denmark, where there are stalls and tethers. A lot of bacon goes under brand names, in any case. The Danish pig industry has done a tremendous marketing job for many years. In my local supermarket last week I could not buy any bacon other than Danish, and I am in a rural area. If the supermarkets have shown the way, I do not put much faith in the support that we will get in the future.

I believe that the Minister is considering banning certain antibiotics, including growth enhancers. If that is done simultaneously throughout the European Union,

there will be no competitive advantage to other countries, but if we do it even before the science says that growth enhancers are wrong, we will heap more costs on British pig farmers. I understand that, for every £1 that will no longer be spent on antibiotics, £6 will have to be spent on feeding the animals. How does the Minister intend to ensure that any ban is science-based and applied equally throughout the European Union?

Pig feed made from meat and bone meal is banned here, but not in the rest of the European Union. What hope can the Minister give the British pig farmers for progress on that?

Consumers should be given as much information as possible. They do not know that farmers are getting less for their product, because prices in the shops are virtually the same as they were two years ago. How can we ensure that consumers have the information to make intelligent decisions about what they buy?

Pig farmers used to get something for the waste from the pig, but now they get nothing: in fact, they have to pay to get all the waste destroyed.

My greatest fear is that, with all the extra costs and higher standards, British pigmeat will be more expensive and supermarkets will simply go for what is cheaper. Housewives will certainly go for the cheaper option, because many of them are on fixed incomes and cannot afford to make ethical or moral choices. What consultations is the Minister holding on support for the British pig industry?

I read in *The Daily Telegraph* this morning that 1.3 million extra eggs are being sold every day because Delia Smith demonstrated some recipes using eggs. Do British pig farmers have to rely on Delia Smith to concoct a wonderful recipe including British pigmeat to give the industry a boost, or can they rely on the Minister for some support?

We are looking for a level playing field, even though I hate that phrase. We are in a competitive, cut-throat world, and we are heaping extra costs on British pig farmers, giving the rest of Europe a competitive advantage. The industry will be listening when the Minister replies.

11.24 am

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): There is all-party support for the British pig industry, and I was a little saddened that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) sought party advantage in what is obviously a dire crisis for the whole of agriculture, and especially the pig industry. The idea of intervention, at which he was hinting, is not historically justified. According to my researches, pig farming has not historically received state support, and I do not believe that pig farmers want subsidy, although I understand that they face particular problems.

Veterinary inspection is required not only for pigs: I recently visited a turkey farm—run by a family firm since the 1920s—where people made the same points to me as the pig farmers made to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley. They are most anxious that the charges for continuous veterinary inspection should be on a headage or a weight basis, because the small operator is bound to suffer if there is a time-cost charge. In this time of agricultural crisis, I see some merit in the Government's at least considering some assistance with the cost of veterinary inspection for those involved in animal husbandry.

Mr. Hayes: One understands that universal subsidies cannot be applied across the board, especially in the arable, pigmeat and poultry sectors, but specific, targeted and focused help for exactly the sort of producers that the hon. Gentleman highlighted—in Essex and Lincolnshire—might have been expected from the statement earlier this week. I hope that the Minister will bring a more helpful proposal to the House.

Mr. Hurst: My judgment was that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was warmly received and that it was generally accepted that he had consulted widely and listened, and had taken almost all the financial steps that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) had urged him to take about two weeks earlier.

Mixed farms used to be much more common than they are today and, perhaps not in Norfolk but in many other areas, people used to move into and out of pig farming according to the state of the market, but that is no longer possible, because pig production has become much more capital-intensive. As far as I can gather, all farmers welcome the improvement in welfare standards, but that has added to capital costs, so people can no longer do pigs one year and chickens the next.

I am a little anxious if the only solution to the pig farming problem is thought to be discussions with our European neighbours about bringing all welfare standards up to the same level, because, if we wait for those negotiations to reach a proper conclusion, there will be few pig farmers left in this country to produce a product that has been so successfully improved over recent years.

Encouraging figures were given in a recent Adjournment debate, showing the progress that the pig farming industry had made over the past few years. A much leaner product has been produced to satisfy popular consumption demand. Until recently, the figures showed that the amount of pigmeat exported from this country had almost doubled.

However, what the industry cannot do—we probably cannot do it either, and it has been skirted around this morning as if it does not matter—is to solve the financial crisis in Russia and the far eastern economies. It is not just our pigmeat producers who cannot export to those countries; our European competitors face the same problem. In a declining world market, everybody will jostle and tussle, almost like pigs in a pen, for what is left in the market. I am not surprised that the Danish and Dutch producers are seeking to enter our markets, just as we would seek to enter theirs.

At present, our people are disadvantaged because of the strength of the pound. I appreciate that there is no easy answer to that. In all my reading of the proceedings in this Chamber going back over many decades, I have not yet found any Government saying that it is their policy to weaken the currency. That is not the answer. We have to accept that there is a problem because our competitors' products are cheaper than ours and because they have not advanced as far as we have in welfare considerations. Many of our producers have implemented those welfare considerations voluntarily.

[Mr. Hurst]

We need to be a little careful about horror stories about the wickedness of our competitors. We were warned about that during the beef crisis, when German producers sought to do that about our beef. In fact, they frightened their own consumers so much that they ate less beef of any kind, from whatever country.

It is right to aim some criticism at the supermarket monopolies. They have enormous power in the agricultural community. It is right that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have entered into discussions with the supermarket chains, or the organisation that represents them, to secure certain assurances for pigmeat producers in particular and for the producers of more general meat products.

The assurance which already exists is that the product will be labelled according to the country of rearing and birth rather than the country of packaging. It has always seemed absurd to state where something is packaged. There is no earthly point in my being told that Somerset cider is bottled in London. I want to know that it comes from Somerset. The same would apply to any other regional product. I want to know that I am buying British bacon if that is what I choose. I believe that my right hon. and hon. Friends have made considerable advances, bearing in mind the power of the supermarket chains in retail sales.

I believe that things have gone further. As was announced earlier this week by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, supermarket chains are saying that, from 1 January, they will offer for sale only pork or bacon products which are produced to the same level of welfare standards as ours. I have a degree of faith in British consumers and I believe that, once that proposition becomes more widely known, they will seek to purchase our products rather than those which are deemed to have been produced in a less humane manner.

I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley—that, while the supermarket chains are in their benevolent phase, one may be able to make a judgment about what type of bacon or pork to buy, but it is different when one dines in a restaurant. I suppose one could ask whether the bacon on the plate is British. I am sure that the waiter would say, "Certainly sir, of course it is British. We serve nothing else." Of course the restaurant is unlikely to expect anyone to be particularly seeking Dutch or some other sort of bacon. There is a problem, and there is no instant solution.

I am encouraged by the representations that my right hon. and hon. Friends have made to Government Departments to encourage them to consider the purchase of British meat products. Opposition Members sometimes seem to slide back in time and act like socialists of the old school when they ask why it is not possible to demand that the armed forces serve only British bacon. They seem to have forgotten that we now operate in a world of competitive tendering and best value, and that people have no choice but to go for the cheapest as long as it is of equal standard.

We would say that that can be overcome by the proposition that our meat products are of a superior standard and that, even if they are fractionally more expensive, one can still make a choice according to best value. It is not a question of ministerial edict. We cannot say, "You must buy British products." We would have the whole system of European law come down upon us if we sought to restrict our Government Departments to using only our products.

I am encouraged by the steps that the Government have taken so far in the areas where they have the power so to do. I hope that they will consider providing, perhaps at some public expense, the ability to store pigmeat products so as to take them out of the market. I hope that they will also consider some assistance with veterinary charges.

11.35 am

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): I speak as a Member of Parliament in the county of Suffolk. That county relies to some extent on the pig industry for agricultural production.

The crisis in the livestock industry is manifest. The depression facing my county is the worst it has seen since the 1930s. There has been a great deal of constructive dialogue with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and I pay particular tribute to those bodies that have advised me and other local Members of Parliament—the National Farmers Union branches in Bury St. Edmunds, Stowmarket, Eye and Stanton, and the British pig industry support group, eastern region, which has been trying to find a way to influence the Government and to brief hon. Members in an effective way.

The small amount of progress that has been made on behalf of the pig industry has, to a large extent, been the result of initiatives taken by bodies outside Government. Although the Ministry has been making warm noises and saying that it wants to listen and consult, in reality the little progress that has been achieved has been the result of direct action by Members of Parliament who have been lobbying the supermarket chains on behalf of the National Farmers Union and other industry groups to try to get some practical measures under way.

One example of those practical measures is the "buy British" campaign. Many hon. Members, including myself, have written to all the supermarkets in their constituencies. I have written to the chairmen and chief executives of all the supermarket chains in my constituency asking them to go out of their way to publicise the benefits of British pigmeat and to organise the labelling on their own-brand products to identify pigmeat as being British reared and produced, not just British packaged.

In a debate in the House in July, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), there was a suggestion that Ministers should do what they could to ensure that, as far as possible, the source of pigmeat used by local authorities for school meals and by the armed forces should be the United Kingdom. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) that we cannot have a socialist-style diktat to ensure that local authorities and the armed forces' procurers demand British pigmeat. That cannot be achieved overnight.

Nevertheless, under the terms of best value, Ministers should be able, on welfare grounds alone, to flag up the fact that we produce the highest standard of pigmeat. On quality, we are better than foreign pigmeat producers, and price does not come into it. I hope that the Minister will be able to give a detailed explanation of how local education authorities and the armed forces are trying to use British-produced pigmeat.

The aid package announced by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food did not do anything for the pig industry, and my local NFU representatives will be intrigued to hear claims that there has been no demand for state help or some public spending assistance for the pig industry. However, I wish to discuss not what the Government have not done, but what they can do in the future and I have two specific issues to raise.

My first concern is the level at which supermarkets set retail prices for pigmeat. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) produced figures that I believe understate the fall in United Kingdom producer prices in the pig industry. He mentioned 55 per cent., and that figure was true in August this year. The Library advises me that 55 per cent. may be the fall in producer prices, but the average fall in retail prices over the same time is 13 per cent. That differential is troubling to pig producers in my county. It is bad enough that producer prices have fallen through the floor, but it is even more galling to discover that the supermarkets' policy is not encouraging British consumers to buy British-produced pigmeat.

What can the Government do about that problem? They may say, "We do not live in a socialist dictatorship: it is a matter for the private sector to determine retail price levels." That is largely true, but Ministers could hold serious discussions with the Office of Fair Trading to investigate the policy under which the price of pigmeat seems to be stuck at a high level when producer prices are so much lower. The British consumer is suffering and so is the British pig producer. My constituents and those who write to me regularly on the subject want to know what Ministers have said to the OFT, and what steps they are taking within the regulatory regime to ensure that falls in producer prices are sensibly passed on to the British consumer.

My second question needs a direct response from the Minister. Our regime for pig welfare is, without doubt, the best in Europe, and probably the best in the world. It was initiated by the previous Government and has been—in my view, sensibly—continued by the Ministry. However, producers in the pig industry are disturbed when they face a regime that prosecutes them for using meat and bonemeal in their pig units or for using sow stalls and tethering, but supermarkets can import pigmeat reared and produced using those production techniques.

If it is illegal for British meat produced in such a manner to be placed on supermarket counters, how can it be legal, just, right and fair for those same supermarkets to sell imported meat produced by the very techniques that are banned in this country? What legal advice has the Ministry received on that point? British pig producers do not have a level playing field, but worse still, potentially dangerous meat products are allowed on our shelves. If meat and bonemeal cause problems when fed to pigs in this country, they must also cause problems in imports from Holland and elsewhere on the continent. I hope that the Minister will answer that question in legal terms, and tell us what advice he has received.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley raised a question about the official veterinary inspection service. The number of hours that are imposed on small producers and the cost per hour are increasing. I am indebted to a long briefing by Mr. Arthur Diaper, who is a poultry producer in Horley in my constituency. He gives a toe-curling analysis of the additional costs that he, as a small family business man, faces from the increased inspection charges. He makes a point about inspection levels on the continent, to which I would like a response from the Minister.

The Minister of State wrote to me and said that, if the rules were not observed in, for example, Greece, the Commission could take infraction proceedings. That is the legal position, but, to give confidence to poultry producers such as Mr. Diaper, will the Minister confirm that he will ask the Commission to give examples of infraction proceedings that it has brought against producers outside the United Kingdom, but within the European Union, for breaches of inspection rules and regulations relating to the official veterinary service?

We are told that the issue is a matter for the Commission, but the Minister needs to give confidence to producers in this country that they operate under the same rules and regulations as other parts of the European Union. Nothing less than an assurance that the Minister will talk to the Commission will do for producers in my constituency.

The Minister does his best to be an amiable and genial defender of Government policy, and he and his colleagues do their best to listen. They are good at warm words and the soft, fluffy-edged skills that are so characteristic of the new Labour party. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with that. It makes for good soundbites, and it looks good.

The Minister has been good enough to notify me that he will address a meeting in Bury St. Edmunds next week. That will be the first sighting in my constituency of any shadow Minister or Minister of any description from the Labour party during the three years in which I have been there. It is such a first that we all wonder why he is turning up. If he wants to listen to us, that is fine, but the people who attend the meeting will not want to hear just warm words. They want to know what practical and effective steps the Government will take to help farming in general and livestock in particular.

I should like specific answers to the three specific points that I have raised today, and my constituents would like those answers, too. If the Minister does not reply today, he will certainly be asked for answers when he visits my constituency.

11.50 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I welcome the opportunity to discuss farming, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on gaining a debate on both the pig industry and the wider livestock situation. We went along the same path some weeks ago when the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) raised a related issue.

I want to respond to several of the points made by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley, and to make some general points of my own. While he and I can agree that there is a crisis, the House has heard some rewriting of the history of how we got into it, and of how the Government are trying to deal with it. I did not hear the letters BSE emanate from the hon. Gentleman's mouth, but we cannot forget that many of the problems facing British agriculture stem from that crisis. I was intrigued to hear the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) say how unfair was the ban on feeding meat and bonemeal to pigs. I challenge them to say whether they suggest that we should end that ban.

Mr. Ruffley: Our speeches made it clear that we welcomed the ban because it contributes to our high

[Mr. Ruffley]

welfare standards. The question is whether the same high standards are being observed on the continent, and the answer is that they are not.

Mr. Drew: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I share his wish that the same standards should apply. There is clearly a need to pressure retailers, caterers and meat processors, who have not been mentioned so far, into adhering to the same standards.

We have heard a lot about welfare standards. Like other hon. Members, I have spoken to the Meat and Livestock Commission and it would seem, from the commission's consumer profiling, that welfare standards are not foremost in consumption decisions made by individual customers. Interestingly, however, when irradiated food was offered to customers, almost all of them chose not to buy it, despite the inducement of lower prices. There is a job to be done in ensuring that consumers understand the need for higher welfare standards, as well as higher quality and environmental standards. The House, and the trade itself, must ensure that we get that message across to the consumer.

My main point is that we must understand that the pig industry operates in a dysfunctional market. When it comes to the over-supply of pigmeat, one problem not raised so far is that the market is not only open—that has been said—but cyclical, a fact that raises its own difficulties. Many farmers chose to begin production of pigmeat at the very time when excess supply problems were likely, and that has made those problems worse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) has made clear, the loss of markets because of both declining demand and excess supply, particularly in Russia and south-east Asia, makes it little wonder that we have reached the nadir—at least, I hope we have—of prices and over-supply.

A more difficult tie-in is the fact that some market segments within agriculture are controlled, and others are not. People can see that their livelihoods may be affected by those controls, and that is particularly so for the beef and lamb sectors. There is a temptation to move to the freer market areas, and that has happened to a limited extent in my constituency. My farmers are principally dairy farmers, but there is some beef and sheep production. Some farmers decided 18 months or so ago to move into pigmeat production, and they have caught a cold. They have suffered a difficult decline because agriculture is not—to use a favourite phrase—a level playing field. The field is not even level within agriculture itself, and we cannot underestimate the damage that results from that.

No one doubts that we are discussing changes to our whole production process. Even the laggards in the rest of the European Union, let alone those in the rest of the world, understand that we are moving away from supply constraints towards lower prices with direct support. That support may come through mechanisms for environmental support, or it may be direct economic support. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced a package of support earlier this week, and some of us welcomed it greatly. We shall soon see its overall impact on agriculture.

In the meantime, however, we must manage the crisis that none of us would deny. We must realise that difficult decisions are needed if we are to move to freer markets in the medium term, and if we are to recognise more global markets in the long term. As I learn more about farming, I am interested to find that some pig producers in the south-west are already global operators. I have met people who are already farming in Brazil and in eastern Europe. That is not uncommon. To suggest that the problems are purely domestic is to underestimate greatly the significant changes that have happened. That does not detract from the fact that there is an excess of supply, and that that is driving down prices.

Ben Gill, president of the National Farmers Union, has produced an interesting document for the European Policy Forum. It includes a graph showing that the retail price index for all items has risen since 1987 from a base of 100 to 160. The RPI for food only has risen from 100 to about 138, but farmgate prices have dropped off dramatically since about 1996. The graph ends with 1997, and I cannot pretend that the situation has not got a lot worse since then. It is clear, however, that farmgate prices, which had previously risen far less steeply than had the comparable sectors, have declined dramatically since early 1996.

There are serious problems, and we must deal with them. I agree with the solutions suggested by the NFU, and by Ben Gill in particular. We must seek value added at the root of the food chain, rather than having supermarkets deciding their margins, then passing them down the food chain as reverse benefits. That simply is not acceptable. At the same time, we need to recognise that farmers can collaborate more, which may allow them at least to hold down the increases in costs, if not to seek a reduction in costs through economies of scale.

I return to the point that we are moving towards more globally driven markets in all agricultural products, but we must provide opportunities for people to produce on a localised level and seek niche markets.

The pig and livestock sector will recover. It must proceed along a rocky path at the moment, but I have every faith that farmers will find a way to rebuild the sector and ensure a much healthier future.

12 noon

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) for initiating this important debate. We shall listen to the Minister with great interest.

We are talking not about a complaint, but about a crisis across all agricultural sectors, which is felt nowhere more acutely than in pig farming. Farmers in my constituency are being driven to ruin. I fear that they will be driven to worse than ruin. There was recently a tragic case of a farmer's suicide in the neighbouring constituency of Macclesfield. We have to turn the situation around.

I shall read briefly from a letter that a pig farmer in my constituency wrote to me. He said:

"There are no words to describe the financial plight of the pig industry at the moment. It really is criminal what the supermarkets are doing and the government are not doing. The supermarkets are claiming all the rewards from the general public through the drastic price increases they add onto the farmers prices. I am at this time getting half my break even price for my pigs, that is about £30.00 a pig loss and I sell 110 pigs a week."

That man has spent £50,000 updating his facilities. He has no way of getting a return on that investment. He is facing ruin, and he sees no future for himself or other pig farmers in the constituency.

I wonder what we can do to help. Of course, we look to the Government for action to alleviate the crisis, but we can use the bully pulpits of our speeches, our meetings with constituents and the little articles that we write in our local weekly papers and urge people to buy British. They are patriotic, and they know that we produce the best.

The same applies to our poultry industry, which in my constituency is suffering greatly and is about to suffer even more acutely from the demand that there be full-time vets on site. Family businesses cannot survive in that way.

My father was a farmer and a country writer of some distinction. He farmed through the recession in the early 1930s. In the second world war, he wrote urging soldiers to go back, when the war was over, to life on the farm and agriculture, because then it offered the prospect of a decent living. Now it does not, and I suspect that, if he were alive today, under no circumstances would he make such a recommendation. There is not a living to be made.

The Government must turn the situation around, and I am sure that we, as Members of Parliament, can help. It is the responsibility of us all to make sure that the pig industry survives and that our farms are not a wasteland.

12.3 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who, with typical charm and acumen, obtained this debate and started it so well. It is a great pleasure to speak in a debate to which the hon. Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) have contributed. They always make thoughtful speeches in our deliberations on agriculture, as do my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) and the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell).

I want to make several points and a plea. First, the greater specialisation that is the consequence of an appropriate drive for quality and the greater focus and expertise that will be produced will make the livestock industry more vulnerable. The hon. Member for Braintree said that, in days of old, people would go into and out of sectors: for example, they would go into pigs or out of poultry. That was also the case in the arable sector. It is becoming less and less true. That specialisation will create an inevitable inflexibility when a particular sector is hard hit, and it must be taken into account in any future regime that we establish.

Secondly, there is an interdependence born of fellowship in agriculture, but there is also a more commercial interdependence. The price of and demand for grain is critical to the livestock producer and the effect on morale of a blow to one part of the industry is felt widely. There is far greater interdependence than is recognised and acknowledged.

Thirdly, demands for quality will also result in a need for greater capital investment. That was mentioned earlier in relation to pigs, but, not wishing to tether us to pigs, I am trying to speak a little more widely. That capital investment will mean that farmers find that they cannot move in and out of products and will exacerbate the trend that I mentioned in my first point. Farmers will also have to borrow more to invest. It is often said that farmers have had good times and now they have bad times, and that they should have spread their money across the years. We all know that life does not work like that, but the claim is particularly untrue in farming, where good years tend to produce the greatest capital investment and lean years mean that farmers depend on that investment to get them through. Greater capital investment is now necessary, and will certainly be significant in the future.

My fourth point is about the extension of Community regulations on co-operatives. We need more co-operation in the industry, particularly on sharing best practice and on more appropriate and more skilled joint marketing. I wonder if it would be possible to extend the Community regulations and directives on co-operatives to private amalgamations and collaborative organisations. A number of those already exist in the arable sector, as the Minister will know, and in the livestock sector. That is a growing trend.

Mr. Drew *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hayes: I see the hon. Gentleman nodding. He also mentioned that point. We need to consider how we can most effectively support that trend.

My fifth point is to nail the point about the market. I am a business man and I made my money in business, but we must recognise, as *The Times* said earlier this week:

> "Market collapse, followed by an exodus of farmers, could threaten the land's husbandry. The Government and public must acknowledge that preventing this costs money."

The plant of a farmer—the buildings and the land—is our vista, our horizon and our rural idyll. I know that critics will say that that is a suburban misinterpretation of the rural world, but there is little apart from farming that one can do with land. It is not flexible like commercial property, such as offices and factories. Reskilling and the re-use of plant and investment is much harder in agriculture, and we must acknowledge that the Government will always have to intervene to pay, incentivise and reward farmers for that role in land husbandry. Their countryside is our countryside, and we should not be ashamed to say so.

My plea is for the Government to take a strategic view, and to develop a vision for agriculture. What we had earlier this week—it was presented as nothing else—was an emergency aid package. It was accident and emergency treatment, not preventive medicine. It did not reflect a bigger picture or a long-term goal or vision. If we are to talk about restructuring the industry, we must know into what we are restructuring it.

When the Select Committee on Agriculture considered the beef industry, one of our greatest complaints was that there seemed to be an absence of long-term vision. How big will the industry be? How many producers will there be? What will the level of production be? We need to make those judgments now if we are to work to a meaningful and realistic agenda and give farmers the faith that we have a clear sense of direction that can be coherently and consistently communicated to them. At the moment, everything appears to be reactive. I do not say that particularly of this Government—it is not a party political criticism.

We have tended to react, rather than to plan strategically. That is my plea: let us have a strategic division. Let us not be buoyed by events. Let not Europe dictate the terms. This is a matter of national interest. I shall not repeat all the valid points that have been made

[Mr. Hayes]

about supermarkets, although I could wax lyrical on that topic all day—not that you would let me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is a need for a clearly defined, long-term plan that will be supported by all parties and the industry, and which will revitalise agriculture and give it a place in the next millennium.

12.9 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Because of the short time available to me, I cannot deal in detail with the contributions that we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)—who introduced the debate and spoke with great passion and concern as he outlined the problems—for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) and for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes). We also heard contributions that we on these Benches have learnt to enjoy from the hon. Members for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Tatton (Mr. Bell). It is notable that the only contribution from the Liberals is the fact that one of their spokesmen has just walked into the Chamber.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman is not entitled to walk into the Chamber at the last moment and take up the time of those who have been present throughout the debate. *[Interruption.]* I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman should sit down and listen.

The debate takes place against the background of steps that the Government have taken, which I value. In large measure—I do not say this in a partisan sense—those are points that we put to the Government, as did farmers. I welcome the action that has been taken in respect of agrimonetary compensation, HLCA payments and the calf processing scheme. All that is right and proper, and I commend the Government for it.

There has been comment this morning about the amount of money in the Government's package. I do not dismiss £120 million as a derisory sum; it is not. However, the crisis involves far more than money. That contribution represents less than 5 per cent. of the decline in farm incomes over the past three years. If it were simply a matter of money, the position would be entirely different. As we have said repeatedly, what we need from the Government is not so much an effort of money as an effort of will. They must recognise that there is a problem of unprecedented proportions, and be prepared not only to take fiscal measures, but to listen to what people want and to act on it.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made much play in his recent statement about the arrangement that he had reached with the British Retail Consortium. That has been mentioned in the debate by other hon. Members, and I make no apology for returning to it. Although I particularly enjoy the contributions of the hon. Member for Braintree, he is simply wrong when he sums up the deal—if it amounts to that—that has been reached as ensuring that supermarkets will not sell products that have not been produced to the same standards as ours.

It is instructive to study the short and unhappy genealogy of the deal. In the House on 4 November, the Minister pulled a rabbit out of a hat, if I may mix metaphors. Referring to the British Retail Consortium and major retailers, he said:

"They have assured me also that, from 1 January 1999, all pigmeat sold in their outlets will be from animals raised to high welfare standards, with no stalls and tethers and no meat and bonemeal feedstuffs."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 1998; Vol. 318, c. 952.]

The British Retail Consortium promptly decided to reinterpret what it had agreed with the right hon. Gentleman. On 12 November he was forced to say:

"The British Retail Consortium assures me that its agreement regarding pigmeat sold in its outlets—being stall and tether-free and meat and bonemeal-free—applies to not only fresh pork but processed products, such as bacon, and is being extended to cover ham, sausages and even pork pies."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 466.]

Great joy and felicitation and the issuing of much bunting, perhaps, but still the British Retail Consortium was concerned about that gloss being put on its deliberations.

On 16 November, the Minister stated:

"The industry's intention was that that covers not only fresh meats but processed meats, including bacon and products such as pork pies. Supermarkets were willing to take responsibility only for those processed products over which they had direct control—in other words, their own brands.—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 632.]

In that form, the assurance is not worth the paper that it is written on. With their buying power, supermarkets can decide what they will and will not put on their shelves. They have the combined might to tell suppliers that they do not want products that do not meet the standards that apply in this country. The existing assurance is worse than meaningless, although I accept that at the time the right hon. Gentleman must have thought it was an assurance worth having. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will tell us what steps the Government intend to take to make sure that it amounts to something.

Steps can be taken now. They require an effort of will from the Minister and his colleagues to stand up for this country's interests in Europe. It has been suggested to me by the National Farmers Union, to which I am grateful for these points, that various steps could be taken with regard to the pig industry. The NFU tells me that it has given the Government evidence that state aid is being given by other countries in the EU, specifically France, to help their domestic pig industry.

We know what will happen. The matter will be investigated, and, in due course, the farmers will be told to give the money back. That is how it is done over there, but it is not sufficient. Farmers are entitled to ask the Government to find out what is going on in the EU and to put their foot down. That requires an effort of will.

Fiscal measures could be taken in the Budget, but I do not have time to go into detail. In Europe, the Government should fight to ensure that export credit guarantees are given so that we can compete on equal terms with the United States. We need an early food package for Russia, coupled with a higher rate of EU export refunds for such commercial transactions as can take place.

It is clear that, at present, there is a surplus in Europe. The Government should vigorously initiate discussions with our EU partners about the steps that will be taken to remove the surplus.

With reference to livestock, we have heard what could be done through meat inspection charges in the industry. Time does not permit me to elaborate. We know what could be done to meet the cost of enforcing specified risk material. We know what could be done in terms of the date-based export scheme. Other measures are needed to promote flexibility and an early retirement scheme for farmers.

It is not good enough to claim that nothing more can be done. I have great regard for the Parliamentary Secretary, but it is not good enough for him to bleat, as he did in an intervention, "There is not much that we can do—it is all down to Europe." It is not.

Mr. Morley: I did not say that.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman will want to check *Hansard*. I made a careful note of what he said. This is not the first time that we have heard the Government say, "We would like to help, but we cannot help because of Europe." We want a commitment from our Government to stand up and fight for this country's interests in Europe. It is no good the Government saying that they represent a bridge into Europe, if their idea of a bridge is simply to lie down so that other people can walk over them.

I want a commitment from the Government to get the right deal for British farmers in Europe, in the same way as the Spaniards seek the best deal in the interests of their fishermen.

I recognise that the Government are taking measures, and that part of the problem is the cyclical nature of the farming industry—there are good years and bad years. However, one overriding issue distinguishes this crisis in agriculture from any other: the Government's mismanagement of the economy. The pig, livestock and poultry sectors are all feeling the effects of a pound that is so strong not as a result of deliberate Government action, but as a result of deliberate Government mismanagement of the economy.

That is why the Government are ultimately responsible for the depth of the crisis. That is why it is fair for the farming industry and Conservative Members to point out that the unique strength of this crisis is the fault of those who inhabit Downing street. I would like to think that, as a result of this debate, the Minister might comprehend the scale of the problem and what Government economic mismanagement is doing to our agriculture. However, I suspect that, instead of comprehension and empathy, there will be a yawning void.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I regret that the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) has tried to make a partisan point in what has been a good debate about the real crisis facing agriculture. He suggested that that crisis is a result of the Government's economic mismanagement, when we know very well that much of the pressure on agriculture is due to the collapse of traditional markets, the strength of our currency—although that has devalued by 10 per cent. in recent months—and to a significant increase in production in certain agricultural sectors. There has been a 16 per cent. increase in pig sector production over the past two years. Those factors, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out correctly and fairly in his opening remarks, have contributed to the current problems.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on a very good and knowledgeable speech, which outlined the pressures that his farming constituents—particularly those in the pig industry—face. I shall try to answer the various points raised in the debate in the limited time available.

Several hon. Members mentioned the supermarkets. They will know that the Office of Fair Trading is investigating the supermarkets and examining such things as the disparity between the prices of goods on the shelves and the prices paid to producers. That report will be published next year.

The Minister and I have met the banks—I understand that there will be further meetings—to discuss the current farming situation and emphasise the need for support. In my discussions—I did not meet all the banks, but certainly some of the major agricultural lending institutions—it was made clear that the banking sector has confidence in agriculture and will support farmers, their customers, during this difficult time.

The banks also made several predictions that have so far proved to be quite accurate. At a meeting earlier this year, the banks predicted that the pound would fall in the fourth quarter of this year and that interest rates would peak and decline, and that has occurred. The hon. Member for Teignbridge claimed that interest rates had risen, but they have fallen recently, and the long-term borrowing rate is currently at a 30-year low. The banks also predicted that farm incomes would fall last year and this year, but they are predicting an upturn in 1999. Several factors bear out that prediction.

Mr. Evans: The long-term borrowing rate is mentioned time and time again. Will the Minister concede that farmers borrow not on the long-term rates but on the commercial rates that are available today and those that have been available for the past two years? That is the problem.

Mr. Morley: I think that some farmers do borrow on long-term rates: it depends on their commercial judgment and the size and nature of their operations. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can rule that out.

Several hon. Members mentioned European Union directives. I emphasise that we comply with those directives in this country, and it is not fair to say that other countries do not do likewise. We have repeatedly told several industry sectors that, if they are aware of disparities within the EU, we will not hesitate to investigate them, raise them with the Commission—the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) made that point—and press for immediate action in cases where other member states are not implementing regulations in the same way as we are. I give the House that absolute guarantee.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Some pig producers have claimed that France, in particular, is subsidising its domestic industry. Will the Minister challenge that practice in the Council of Ministers?

Mr. Morley: I was about to come to that. We have already challenged it, together with other member states,

[Mr. Morley]

and France is not paying anything towards its pig industry at present as a consequence. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will remain vigilant on that point.

I touched upon the issue of competitive advantage earlier by way of intervention. The House may not be aware that United Kingdom exports of pigmeat to Europe this year increased by 17 per cent. on last year, which was a record year. Some 236,000 tonnes of pigmeat was exported from the United Kingdom to the EU. We have some marketing advantages that we can exploit—indeed, we exported pigmeat to Denmark, which is quite an achievement.

Offal control imposes extra costs, and I would not want to pretend otherwise. However, we all know that that is a result of bovine spongiform encephalopathy—the worst crisis to hit agriculture in the history of this country. We are determined to eradicate BSE from the United Kingdom and deal with those problems. Unfortunately, that means that we must have offal control.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) *rose—*

Mr. Morley: I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will forgive me, but I want to try to answer the points that have been raised in the five minutes remaining.

The review of antibiotics is an EU issue, and it is being approached in that context. Any change in antibiotics will take the form of an EU, and not a unilateral, measure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) adopted a very reasonable approach based on significant knowledge of the industry. I welcome his support, and I shall reassure him about storage aids in a moment. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds referred to labelling, supply and flagging up standards in the industry. We certainly intend to address those issues.

Any imports into this country must comply with the law, but we can set higher standards if we choose to do so. We have done that in relation to welfare standards in the pig industry, and I emphasise that that has marketing advantages in terms of meat and bonemeal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) emphasised the importance of consumer choice and marketing. I agree with him absolutely. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) made a powerful case on behalf of his constituents. I assure him that the Government fully recognise the impact of the present difficulties on the agriculture industry. That is why we introduced the recent package, which is in addition to the package introduced last year and the regular subsidies that I will mention in a moment. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) made several sensible points, particularly regarding marketing and co-operation. The Government will consider how to take those matters forward in the near future.

We have announced a package of £120 million for the livestock industry. The sum is additional to the overall subsidy for the agricultural sector, which is the equivalent of £50 for every man, woman and child in this country. That is a significant amount. I emphasise that the pig industry—on which this debate has focused—is unsubsidised and is a very light EU regime. We have held talks with the United Kingdom pig industry and, although it has certainly requested a package of support measures and equal treatment and raised several points that were mentioned in the debate, it has not asked for any subsidy. The industry asked the Government to take action against French and German state aid to their domestic industries. We have acted on both counts, and neither Germany nor France is supplying state aid to its pig industry. We are trying to ensure that all member states abide by the rules.

Time is limited in terms of compiling a package of measures for the pig industry, but a further increase of 30 per cent. in the rate of export refunds on fresh and frozen carcase meat was agreed on 15 October. At yesterday's meeting of the pig management committee in Brussels, the decision was taken to increase the level of export refunds from 40 to 70 ecu per 100 kg for fresh and frozen cuts and carcases that are exported to Russia. That is a generous increase that reflects both the economic problems in Russia and the position of the EU pig market. In respect of the EU pig industry, the total package of storage aids, which apply in our country, is the equivalent of more than £100 million. That is going towards helping the pig industry now.

I make it clear that considerable financial support is being given to the pig industry, and in practical terms we have raised continuously that industry's high standards. The British Retail Consortium statement was welcome; the major supermarkets have made it clear that they will be sourcing only fresh pigmeat and bacon, and sourcing their own-process brands—including sausages, pies and so on—from systems that produce stall-free, meat and bonemeal-free pigmeat; and we will be meeting the branded manufacturers to find out whether we can extend that to a wider range of products to assist the pig industry.

The Government will not hesitate to give the pig industry, the livestock industry and agriculture in general what support they can. We have shown that, both financially and through our commitment to give those industries the backing that they deserve.

Floods (South Wales)

12.30 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Wales has a reputation for rain, but the rain that fell between 21 and 23 October and during the following week was exceptional. Compared to the horrific and unimaginable effects of Hurricane Mitch in central America, our experience was relatively mild, but what happened may be related to the increasing incidence of severe weather, which is attributed to the climatic change caused by global warming.

The aim of the debate is to reflect the concerns of people who were directly affected in those floods, to consider the role of the public services, and to call on the Welsh Office to review the readiness and capacity to respond to incidents of serious flooding in the context of global climatic change.

On the morning of 23 October, I saw in my constituency the effects of the worst floods that south Wales has experienced since 1979, when 7,500 properties were affected. Some would say that the floods were the worst since 1945. The Environment Agency interim report on the October floods states that 500 homes in Wales were flooded; rainfall generally exceeded 150 mm, or 6 in; and in certain locations, such as Treherbert in the Rhondda valley, up to 9 in of rainfall was recorded.

The worst-affected areas have been Merthyr Vale and Aberfan, where residents reported a "surge of clean water" from the Afon Taff, which flooded 160 properties in a few minutes; Pontypridd was flooded by the Taff and Rhondda rivers; Porth, New Tredegar and Ystrad Mynach were affected; in Llandovery, the Afon Bran flooded 155 properties; in Pencoed, near Bridgend, 61 properties were affected; in Aberdulais, 17 properties were flooded; and in the Vale of Glamorgan, about 30 properties were flooded as a result of the level of the River Thaw, and there was widespread disruption to traffic.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): The extent of the damage due to flooding in Vale of Glamorgan as portrayed in the Environment Agency's interim report greatly understates the damage that was caused. It is a miracle that no one was killed in my constituency. One old-age pensioner—Mrs. Jennings of Ham Manor Park—waded almost neck deep in flood water, late on the Saturday night. There was total confusion about who my constituents could turn to, and who is responsible in such situations. Should my hon. Friend call for an inquiry, I would support him.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend makes a valid point on behalf of his constituents. What he says adds force to the argument that there should be an independent inquiry into these floods.

I visited homes that were flooded near Abergavenny.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I would echo the call for an inquiry, because not only south Wales was affected by the floods. Herefordshire and the borders were severely affected; indeed, in Herefordshire, one person died in the flooding. Hon. Members will want to commemorate that, and send their condolences to that farmer's family.

May I ask the hon. Gentleman two questions? He mentioned environmental changes. Two physical changes have been cited—certainly in Herefordshire—in respect of the problems of the recent flooding. One is that Welsh Water allegedly opened the sluice gates from reservoirs to release pressure, which caused a surge. That allegation has been denied by Welsh Water, but it has been constantly repeated, and he will have heard it.

The second change to be cited is that, because of the problems associated with agriculture, there have been changes in farming practice, most notably stopping cattle grazing near river edges, which has led to the planting of potatoes. That has caused an increase in topsoil going into rivers, which is silting them up. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I remind all hon. Members that this a brief debate. Time is precious.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point on behalf of his constituents. The whole House will express its condolences to the family of his constituent who lost his life during the floods. I understand that the issue relating to sluice gates may be mentioned by the Minister in his response.

In respect of the homes that I visited near Abergavenny, there was dispute about whether red warnings were issued in time. I met residents in Usk whose homes had been flooded in Llanbadoc. The homes that I visited had been flooded as a result of the failure of the drainage system to cope with the flooding, not because of the River Usk bursting its banks. Despite warnings that there would be a major incident in Usk, that was prevented as a result of the investment in flood defences introduced since 1979.

At a farm near Glangwryne near my constituency, I saw dozens of sheep that had been drowned. Near Usk, more than 40 cattle were reported to have been swept into a flooded river, but, miraculously, all survived. Farmers have experienced a depressing time in recent years, but these incidents have tested to the limit their commitment to farming. As the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) said, at least one farmer lost his life trying to save livestock.

Following the floods, roads were damaged and rendered impassable; drains were blocked, which caused further flooding; wide areas of farmland and open space were transformed into lakes; on the A4042 at Llanellen, near Abergavenny, the River Usk broke its banks with such rapidity that vehicles were stranded, and some drivers and passengers in lorries and cars were rescued in the dead of night.

I have no doubt that, without the efficient and heroic actions of the police and fire services, there could have been serious tragedies. I pay tribute to the retained fire service crew at Abergavenny fire station, which answered numerous calls for assistance during the night. Many of those retained fire officers would have already done a day's work in their normal place of occupation, and may have had to go to work afterwards as well.

South Wales fire services responded to 320 calls about flooding in Gwent alone, and Gwent police placed considerable resources into a gold command at police headquarters in Cwmbran. I also commend the work of Monmouthshire county council and the Environment Agency in my area, and the many individuals who gave their time to assist their neighbours. In Usk, the town council reported problems in the provision of sandbags,

[Mr. Edwards]

and properties prone to flooding were not protected. Concern has also been expressed about the provision of water pumps and dehumidifier equipment, and about whose responsibility it is to provide such equipment.

The following weekend, some properties were flooded in Monmouth town as a result of the dangerous rise in the level of the River Wye, but more widespread flooding was prevented by the flood prevention measures to which I have referred. As the Environment Agency has stated, a key outcome of success is the absence of a flooding incident. Such outcomes are, by definition, unmeasurable.

In recent weeks, we have seen the horrifying effects of the hurricane and the flooding in central America. The apparent worsening of weather conditions has raised many questions about the impact of climate change caused by global warming. The latest findings from the United Kingdom Hadley centre on the changing face of the United Kingdom's weather do not bring good news.

Temperatures are rising. The average global temperature in 1998 is likely to exceed that of 1997, which is the hottest on record. Rainfall will increase during the winter and autumn across the United Kingdom, especially in the north-west and Wales. Consequently, it is predicted that we will experience an increase in climatic extremes such as greater risk of flooding. Although the Government are taking a leading role in the world in addressing the threat of climate change, this evidence shows that the events in south Wales are likely to recur.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am not certain whether the Territorial Army was involved in dealing with the floods in Monmouth and the rest of south Wales, but would not the hon. Gentleman concede that, in general, the armed services, including the TA, become involved when such emergencies happen, and that that is one reason why we should be cautious about reductions in the TA, such as that announced yesterday by the Secretary of State for Defence?

Mr. Edwards: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will discuss the Army and the TA later in my speech.

Following the Easter floods, which affected mainly Northamptonshire, but also Skenfrith in Monmouthshire, the Government established an independent inquiry. I have written to the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), to ask for an independent inquiry into the recent floods, and I am disappointed that, in his parliamentary answer, he has rejected my request.

I ask him to reconsider, and to conduct a general review into flooding in Wales. The review could assess the preparation for climatic changes that seem to affect our country and other nations more frequently; whether our public services are equipped and prepared for civil emergencies such as major flooding, as occurred in south Wales recently and in Towyn in north Wales a few years ago; progress in establishing automatic warning systems; whether the powers of local authorities with respect to flooding should be reviewed and whether local authorities are adequately resourced to deal with flood emergencies; and what role the regular Army or Territorial Army can play in civil emergencies such as flooding.

I acknowledge what the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) says, but it is important to remember that the aim of yesterday's announcement on the Territorial Army was to ensure that the TA can be modernised to respond more effectively to emergencies in this country and abroad when necessary. However, there appears to be a grey area as to when and under what circumstances the Army and the TA in my area are brought in to respond to a civil emergency. I am concerned that the TA tells me that, under a provision of the previous Government, local authorities are billed for the response of the TA, which often makes them reluctant to call it out.

There is also a need to review planning guidelines on development on flood plains, following the recommendations of the Bye report into the Easter floods. One of the lessons of the October floods must be that planning guidelines need to be revised and consistent between Government Departments and the Environment Agency.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): On that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that prevention will be far cheaper than the cost of clear-up afterwards?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Surely the thrust of this debate is that prevention is better than cure.

The flooding of any person's home must be one of the most traumatic personal experiences. Some people have experienced flooding on more than one occasion. Many people live with the constant threat of flooding. For every one of those 500 or 600 families that were affected in October, it was a tragic event. They will naturally ask questions about the circumstances in which their properties were flooded and about the response of the public services.

The aim of the debate has been to raise the concerns of those who have been affected by the floods, to ask for a review into the response of the public services, and to ask the Government to consider whether we are capable of responding effectively to major incidents such as flooding that is caused by global warming.

At the Buenos Aires conference, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"The cost of climate change could be dwarfed by the cost of ignoring"

it. That applies in Wales as it does everywhere else.

12.42 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) for allowing me to participate in the debate. I shall confine my remarks to the local situation. As he pointed out, nearly 200 households in my constituency were seriously affected; they were in Merthyr Vale, Aberfan, Abercanaid, Quaker's Yard, New Tredegar and Tirphil. All suffered the heart-breaking consequences of flooding. I agree with my hon. Friend: there is nothing more heart-breaking than walking into a flooded home. Many people are proud of their homes. To see them covered in sludge and mud is terrible.

The heart-breaking consequences of flooding were brought home to us that weekend—more so in our case, because some of the same streets and communities were hit 20 years ago. Because we had believed that, in many cases, we had put up sufficient defences against a repetition of those heart-breaking events of Boxing night

and afterwards 20 years ago, it was all the more heart-breaking to see the same streets and communities affected—not all; some streets were not affected this time, but, in many cases, the same households were hit 20 years ago.

Therefore, rightly and understandably, there is a justifiable demand for answers about why the flooding happened. In the case of my constituency, there are three or four major questions. First, with all the elaborate processes that were supposed to be in place, why was there no flood warning alert until extremely late in the day—impossibly late to take any meaningful action in Merthyr Vale and Aberfan?

Secondly, many residents in my community testified to surges of clean water coming down the valley. The allegation has been made that, somehow, the water was released from reservoirs at the top. I know that it has been denied, but it has not been explained—another reason why we need an inquiry and the sort of assurances that an inquiry would bring.

Thirdly, the culverts just could not take it. We understand that the weather was exceptional, but I have heard residents say that some culverts and drains had not been maintained properly, supervised or regularly checked, despite repeated requests by local people, so there is the whole issue of maintenance of water systems.

Finally, there is river management: maintaining river banks, cleanliness and the safety of river flows. That was a factor in Tirphil and New Tredegar, where concerns had already been expressed to the Environment Agency some time ago.

All that points to a series of unanswered questions by all those in the communities most affected, and demands for action. In that case, I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth is right. Besides the great climatic issues that he has properly raised—he has put flooding into the broader context—there is a need for answers to questions.

The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), has the power to appoint an inspector, so that evidence can be brought openly and fairly by residents and witnesses to the events to an independent inspector. The Environment Agency, Welsh Water and local authorities can then come to that inspector, explain and, I hope, discover openly and publicly the reasons for those events, and the action that can be taken to prevent them from happening again. Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friend does not slam the door on an inquiry, which is necessary to remove the understandable anger and scepticism that exists as a result of communities and households being flooded so tragically for the second time in 20 years.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jon Owen Jones): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) on raising this important issue, my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) on supporting him, and the many hon. Friends who are also on the Benches to support my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth and to represent constituents who have suffered grievously in the floods.

Twenty years ago, on 27 December, while in Aberdare, I was one of those unfortunate residents who was flooded in that severe flood. As I lived in a bungalow at the time, it was particularly problematic, so I genuinely recognise the difficulties facing many of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth.

Unfortunately, floods are a fact of life, and some flooding is inescapable. Nevertheless, although we cannot prevent flooding, we can take action to reduce the risks. When flooding does occur, we must ensure that we do all we can to issue appropriate warnings and to mitigate its effects.

I pay tribute to the strenuous efforts of all those involved in alleviating the effects of the recent flooding in Wales, particularly the staff of the Environment Agency, who worked very long hours to provide round-the-clock forecasting and warning. I was able to see them in action on the Saturday that much of the flooding occurred, and was impressed by the way in which they were handling matters.

The Environment Agency work force, from both Wales and England, who came to provide relief, were extremely busy checking the security of the agency's defences, reinforcing them as necessary, and otherwise assisting whenever they could. Likewise, staff from many local authorities were keeping their defences in order, clearing debris from culverts, and sandbagging, saving many properties from the effects of flooding. Unfortunately, despite their best efforts, some areas were flooded. Our sincere thanks must go yet again to the police, fire service, local authorities and voluntary organisations that were involved in evacuation, providing temporary accommodation and assisting with clean-up operations.

I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in sending our sympathy to all the people whose homes and businesses were damaged and whose lives were affected by the event, and, in particular, to those who suffered bereavement. I offer my sincere condolences to their families and friends.

I am aware that, for various reasons, some people were not insured. Help may be available to flood victims in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance from the social fund by way of community-care grants or interest-free budgeting loans. People who are not receiving income support may be eligible for a crisis loan. Guidance has recently been issued to all social fund staff on the payment of grants to victims of disasters such as fire floods; that does not, of course, change the policy of successive Governments that, in the case of individuals and most organisations, responsibility for their property is a matter for them.

The rainfall that lead to the flooding was severe. Up to 9 in was recorded between 20 and 25 October, when the flooding was worst in the south Wales valleys. There was further heavy rain on 27 and 31 October, which caused flooding in mid-Wales and the Vale of Glamorgan respectively. The ground was already saturated, and the rainfall simply ran off the hillsides towards the rivers, with little being absorbed.

That rainfall led to large increases in the flow of water in many rivers. Reservoirs overflowed—as they are designed to in such events, for safety reasons. Some, including hon. Members today, have asked whether the flows downstream were increased by discretionary releases that exacerbated flooding, but I am assured that they were not. The hydrological data requested by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) will soon make its way to him.

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

I have overall responsibility for flood defence in Wales, and administer grant aid for capital schemes, but the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of defence measures on main rivers is the responsibility of the Environment Agency. In the case of ordinary watercourses, responsibility rests with local authorities and internal drainage boards. The Environment Agency, however, is also required to exercise general supervision of all matters relating to flood defence, and I have therefore asked the agency for a full report on the floods.

In an interim report to me, the agency has said that the impact on some rivers in south Wales was on a par with that of 1979. On that occasion, flooding of towns and villages was widespread: more than 7,500 properties were flooded, including several hundred in Monmouth. I understand that, on this occasion, only about 700 properties were flooded throughout Wales. That reflects well on investment in flood defences on rivers in south Wales over the past few decades.

Mr. Keetch: I am sorry to press the Minister, but the flooding of the River Wye in Herefordshire, which subsequently affected Monmouth, was considerably worse than the flooding in 1979: indeed, local experts have described it as the worst since 1960. Will the Environment Agency's interim report, and the full report, cover the English borders?

Mr. Jones: My responsibilities cover the borders within Wales. I am not sure of the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, but I will write to him as soon as I have discovered it.

I must give credit to the work of the regional flood defence committee for Wales, and to the relevant local flood defence committees. With the support of the Environment Agency and its predecessors, they have guided and overseen the investment. Much of the money for the work has been provided by local authorities through levies, and I acknowledge the part that those authorities have played in the improvement of defence to protect their towns and villages. That is, of course, in addition to local authorities' own expenditure on flood alleviation in the smaller watercourses and local drainage.

As a result of that expenditure, no properties were flooded on this occasion in Monmouth, where enhanced protection has been provided. It is simply not physically or economically possible to protect everyone, which is why the Government have given flood warning the highest priority.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend says that there was no flooding in Monmouth. According to the Environment Agency, four properties were flooded, but they were outside the defended area.

Mr. Jones: I apologise. I was not informed that properties in Monmouth were flooded.

Flood warning is one of the functions of the Environment Agency. Just two years ago, it was asked to take over the dissemination of such warnings from the police, and to expand the service over a period of five years. For that purpose, new technology has been introduced in the form of automatic voice messaging, so that anyone whose property is at risk of flooding can be dialled and given warning. More general warnings are given to local authorities, emergency services and other organisations, including the media.

General warnings of serious flooding to properties were given on 19 rivers simultaneously at the height of the event. Although not all whom the agency wishes to be on the system in the long term are connected yet, it used the system to issue 16,500 individual flood warnings between 20 and 25 October.

The areas worst affected by flooding from rivers were Aberfan, Llandovery, Pencoed and Aberdulais. At Pontardawe in the Swansea valley, serious flooding was caused by a breach in the bank of the Swansea canal. There were also instances, too numerous to mention, of flooding from blockage of culverts, and from surface water drains that were unable to cope with the deluge.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): May I briefly make a point that no one has made so far? One of the most alarming and depressing features of flooding, especially in urban areas, is the contamination of flood water by sewage. Will my hon. Friend be touching on that? One of the fears that people experience when they are cleaning up and deciding whether to throw carpets away is that fear of sewage contamination.

Mr. Jones: I know that it is a big problem, but I do not know at this stage whether it can be avoided, either practically or financially.

I look forward to the Environment Agency's more comprehensive report on the flooding. Work is being commissioned separately from independent consultants on the situation at Aberfan, and their findings will be made available. The British Waterways Board has commissioned an independent report on the flooding at Pontardawe. We shall look closely at those reports, for there are always lessons to be learnt. I expect central Government, flood defence committees, the Environment Agency and local authorities to learn from the experience, so that we may do better in the future. We cannot stop rain or flooding, but, when cost-effective action can reduce the risks, we must ensure that it is taken.

I have been asked today for a separate independent inquiry into the flooding. I have considered the matter carefully, but, in the light of the work that is to be undertaken, I do not believe that such an inquiry is needed on this occasion. The Environment Agency commissioned an independent review of the flooding at Easter from Mr. Peter Bye. The need for an independent review arose on that occasion because of a widespread concern about the failure to issue warnings, and other significant operational issues.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made a statement on the Bye report to the House on 20 October. As he said then, the Government and the Environment Agency take the report very seriously, and are moving swiftly to deal with the vital issues that were identified in it.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend said that the inquiry was held because of flood warning problems. Flood warning is one of the big issues affecting Aberfan and

Merthyr Vale. Does not the fact that warnings were not given there strengthen our case for the appointment of an inspector?

Mr. Jones: At the time of the Easter floods, there was widespread concern about the failure to give warnings, but that was not the case in Wales. The report arising from the English floods, however, has identified numerous issues, and an action plan will be announced before the end of the month. A comprehensive series of measures will be taken, all of which will affect the way in which we deal with floods in Wales in the future. It is not felt at this stage that an additional independent inquiry is necessary in Wales.

Naturally, the conclusions and recommendations of the Bye report will be foremost in minds when considering what lessons might be drawn from the recent flooding. I note that, during the debate on the Bye report, my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth queried whether Welsh Office planning guidelines needed to be revised so that there is a presumption against new housing development on flood plains. Responsibility for preparing development plans and determining planning applications rests with local planning authorities.

Current planning guidance that local planning authorities should take into account in carrying out those duties is stated in the document "Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy". The guidance advises authorities to ensure that development plan policies and planning decisions take account—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now turn to the next debate.

Lockerbie

1 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I am very glad to have this opportunity, in a very brief Adjournment debate, to raise the issue of trial at the Hague. I know that my interest in the subject is shared very much by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who has fought so hard over the years to get the truth told about Lockerbie. I certainly hope that it will be possible for him to speak in the debate.

One point that we have to bear in mind straight away is that, without this half-hour debate, there would be absolutely no opportunity to debate a rather dramatic, significant and expensive initiative by the Government before 21 December 1998, which is the date on which the United States has been quoted publicly, perhaps incorrectly, as saying that the plug will be pulled on the proposals and that an endeavour will be made to impose more comprehensive sanctions. The House is therefore entitled to ask a few questions about the proposals.

The first and most obvious question is whether there is any time limit on the proposed agreement. The resolution was proposed in the United Nations and the agreement on the trial made between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. However, as the United States seems to have taken on the role of emperor of the world, in a position superior to that of such rather pedestrian institutions as the United Nations, it would be helpful if the Government would say whether there is a relevant time limit.

Secondly, is it the case, as reported in the press, that the premises of the proposed Scottish court will be located on a former United States airbase? As is well known, that suggestion has caused great suspicion in Libya. It would be helpful if the Government would say whether a decision has been made on the location and whether there might be some merit in locating the court in an existing building. The third and most obvious question that the House should ask is, what is the estimated cost of the trial and who will pay for it?

I want to make it abundantly clear that I have absolutely no doubts about the integrity of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), whose attendance I appreciate. I appreciate also the attendance of the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office, who is very busy indeed, but has a great interest in the problem.

It is very important that the Government should be aware of the real suspicions of the Libyans, who, in the normal course of events, have a very good bargain in sending over two of their citizens for trial in exchange for an end to sanctions and all that goes with them. Ministers should be aware that some in Libya have a suspicion that the whole business is a plot by the US, which put the matter before the UN simply because it thought that it would not be able to renew sanctions.

Some specific issues arise from the proposals. The first is the agreement between Britain and the Netherlands. Can that be changed without the agreement of the Libyan authorities? That is a very important point. As the trial procedure appears to have been set out entirely on the basis of an agreement between Britain and the Netherlands, there seems to be absolutely no reason why the two countries cannot propose changes. Is that the case?

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

Secondly, what is the reason for a provision in the agreement for a possible transfer of the trial to Scotland if the two suspects agree to it? It seems difficult to understand why the provision was included, and I should like to know why it was. Thirdly, will sanctions be suspended and not terminated? That matter, too, causes suspicion and is something on which the Minister should comment.

There are wider issues that I hope the Government will consider. First, there has been massive press coverage and television programmes in Libya—I have seen them myself—about the alleged plot to assassinate Colonel Gadaffi, which was revealed by Mr. David Shaylor, a former MI5 official. The Foreign Office has said that the report is without foundation, that it did not approve it, and that the whole thing is a figment of someone's imagination. However, the assassination attempt was real and several people were killed. It is all recorded on film.

Secondly, Mr. Shaylor, who we understand was the head of the Libyan desk in MI5, not only stated that MI6 had initiated the plot, but gave full details about an amount of money, alleged to be £100,000, and to whom it was paid—a Mr. Tonworth, who was an intermediary for a fundamentalist group. Thirdly, it was stated that documents about the assassination attempt were circulating freely within Government offices. Fourthly, it has come to my notice that about a quarter of the material that was to be used in the "Panorama" programme was removed on Government instructions. Substantial and significant injunctions on publication of the details have been imposed on newspapers and television programmes.

As the Minister is well aware, it is alleged that the whole business was thought up not by the current Government, but by the previous Government. However, it would be very helpful in trying to resolve the dispute with Libya if the Government said that there would be a proper inquiry. It would be helpful to know if there was no such sum, if the man who allegedly received the money does not exist, and if the organisation in London which seemed to start the business does not exist. If there were such an assassination attempt, I can think of nothing wrong in telling the truth. I have often taken the view that truth is the secret weapon in politics. Indeed, I think that many of our problems in international relations would be resolved and removed if the truth was told.

I should make it abundantly clear that that particular assassination attempt has been shown widely on television in Libya. There have been full details of all that went before it; details of people allegedly giving information about it; and details of its background. We have not seen many of those details in the United Kingdom, undoubtedly because of the injunction. However, some comment should be made on the matter.

It would be helpful if the Government would state—as I am sure the Minister could for himself—that they had no part in the mass of damaging and wholly untrue stories printed about Libya. I could mention many such stories, but will concentrate specifically on one that was published very recently. *The Sunday Telegraph*—a respectable newspaper that I always buy and enjoy reading—published one of the many stories circulating. It was headed "New Clue Points to WPC's Killer".

As we well know, there has recently been a great deal of evidence on television programmes and in the press that the killer of WPC Fletcher was not someone from the Libyan embassy, and that the bullet came from another building. I do not know the truth, but the story has stirred up some sentiment on the matter.

The dramatic story in *The Sunday Telegraph* stated that Scotland Yard had launched a fresh investigation into the murder of WPC Fletcher after receiving new evidence about the identity of her killer. It seems that that new evidence pointed to a Libyan, because the story went on to say that, because of "dramatic new information", there would soon be an attempt to extradite the guilty party from Libya. The newspaper, to strengthen the story, added a long comment from the Home Secretary, who said that there would shortly be a conclusion of the review.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Ever since I visited Assistant Commissioner David Venness in Scotland Yard, I have believed that Scotland Yard is doing its utmost to resolve the problem of what it called "one of its own". It is a matter not only of a television programme but of the evidence, on camera, of George Styles, one of the British Army's senior ballistics officers; of Hugh Thomas, consultant surgeon at the Royal Victoria hospital, Belfast; and of Bernard Knight, the Home Office pathologist—who was considered responsible enough to be put in charge of Cromwell street and much else. It is a formidable case.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As usual, the hon. Gentleman knows all about the situation. A report into the problem has been initiated, and we shall be interested to see it when it eventually emerges. I phoned the assistant commissioner whom the hon. Gentleman named. He kindly put me on to the inspector in charge of the inquiry, who courteously explained that, as I had suspected, the story in *The Sunday Telegraph* was, in his words, "a load of codswallop". There had been no new evidence. The Metropolitan police had not been consulted about the story. There was no new inquiry. I asked him if I could quote our conversation in this debate, and he gladly agreed.

The inspector further explained that the original inquiry, which had been proceeding for a long time, was nearing completion. However, the damage done by the story is pretty obvious. It is a shame that it appeared in a paper that I have always respected. The quotation in the story from the Home Secretary came from a written answer some time ago in response to a question about the inquiry.

There have been many other such stories. There was one about a secret chemical arms factory in a mountain, which I know contained nothing but a pipe taking water to Tripoli. It was important to Libya. We asked for an independent investigation, and the facts were confirmed. Another rather strange story was published after the terrible recent events in Northern Ireland, suggesting that the new IRA had connections with Libya. Again, every inquiry that I made showed the story to be nonsense. Such stories are printed all the time and cause concern in Libya. I am sure that the Government will confirm that the story that I have referred to is untrue and that there was no question of the Government being involved in circulating such stories.

Are the Government aware of the impact on British trade and industry of the negative opinions resulting from such activities as we have witnessed over the alleged assassination? When I visited Libya for a couple of days recently, I was very worried by a widely circulated document entitled "Embargo on Goods of US and UK Origin". It tells a supplier:

"As for your argument regarding the easy nature of the procedures applied in dealing with UK companies, this is not a sufficient reason for you to disregard the instructions issued in connection with this matter. You are to note that GMRA's approval of some equipment from the UK was an exception intended to assist the company in specific circumstances and should not be used as a rule for what comes later."

That worried me a great deal, because, although I have no interest in firms dealing with Libya, I know that Britain had a good trade relationship with Libya. There is a good sentiment towards the United Kingdom in Libya, particularly because of the events of the second world war. My fear is that, as has happened in other places, Britain is being outsmarted. I am sure that the Minister is well aware that it is difficult to move in Tripoli for Frenchmen these days.

The Minister should be aware that, although the sanctions have been imposed by many countries, the resentment felt in Libya is towards Britain and the United States. My fear is that the Government's well-intended initiative will collapse because they are not prepared to go the extra mile to resolve the situation. The Government have gone to extraordinary lengths to try to bring about a settlement in Northern Ireland, where the problems are frightening. We all hope that they succeed.

The issues that need to resolved could be sorted out in private, meaningful, detailed discussions. Such discussions took place some years ago on Libya's previous links with the IRA. I understand that full information was given on the basis of private discussions in which respect was shown. If the Government initiated such private discussions between officials and the Libyan authorities, nothing would be lost and a great deal could be gained. There would be a better chance of success, an opportunity to remove fears and proof of good will. If things went wrong, at least the Government's case would be strengthened by having gone all the way and tried all they could to resolve the situation.

As the Minister is aware, I received a letter from the Libyan Foreign Minister saying that Libya agreed to the trial if certain assurances were given. The letter ended:

"Libya has emerged from a horrendous endeavour to destroy it with greater strength and unity. We will be glad to co-operate with any honest endeavours to resolve the dispute, but will insist that our nation and people be treated with the dignity and fairness which this victory makes appropriate."

I have no doubt that, on the basis of his previous experience in the House and his work in the Foreign Office, the Minister intends to try to resolve the issue. However, I fear, particularly for the sake of the relatives of those who lost their lives at Lockerbie, that things will go wrong because of a lack of understanding, a lack of commitment and, perhaps, a lack of awareness of what is involved in the various discussions. We have a duty to those who lost their lives to ensure that the truth is told. I welcome what has been proposed, but I hope that the Government realise that to make it happen there could be a case for endeavouring further to resolve the fears and suspicions of Libya. The Government may regard those fears and suspicions as unjustified, but they certainly exist.

I wish the Government every success in what they are doing. They should be driven by the feelings of those who lost relatives in the dreadful bombing at Lockerbie. They want the truth to be told. That can happen only if there is a proper trial. To achieve a trial, the Government must show the necessary good will. I hope that they will, and that progress will be made.

1.15 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I wish that the Crown Office and the Foreign Office would start to talk directly to the Libyans.

1.16 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): As the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) has said, the Government have already taken part in a dramatic and significant initiative on the issues surrounding Lockerbie. That initiative was driven by the same sentiments that the hon. Gentleman expressed at the end of his speech. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my noble Friend the Lord Advocate were exercised by the position of the families, as was I. At that time the families had been looking for truth and justice for nearly nine years and had found little of either—only frustration.

When we came to power, we looked to see what we could do to break the impasse. We were also conscious of the words of friends of Britain, such as President Mandela, who asked whether it was possible to begin to look at ways of moving the situation forward. We considered carefully how that could be done, consistent with certain principles, which had to include the need for real justice to be seen to be done, the need to maintain the integrity of the Scottish judicial system and the need to ensure that no one could regard it as a search for a political compromise, because our prime concern was to ensure that what was offered served the interests of the families.

We took that important initiative in good faith in a public domain. We look for that good faith to be returned. Enabling the Scottish justice system to operate effectively in the Netherlands was not an easy undertaking. The legal and administrative issues were many and complex. We are deeply grateful to the Government of the Netherlands for all the work that they have done to make the trial possible. Our painstakingly worked-out proposal of 24 August was unanimously endorsed by the United Nations Security Council in resolution 1192 on 27 August. It is fair, comprehensive and workable.

Our objective is what it has always been: a free and fair trial—nothing more, nothing less. In discussing the elements of the initiative with the Governments of the United States and of the Netherlands, we were acutely aware of the need to ensure that the proposal was fair not only to the prosecution but to the defence. It would not be right, nor would it serve any of our interests, to engage in a flawed process. The demands of justice require a fair trial.

We have made it clear that the terms of the initiative are not negotiable. That is right and proper, and I repeat that it is now supported by the Security Council resolution. However, we have been willing to provide comprehensive clarification where requested by Libya, and it may be helpful if I explain what some of those

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

clarifications have been. It is right that we should be ready to explain why we are satisfied that the proposal provides for a fair trial.

The answers that we have provided show that there is no hidden agenda, that the trial will be of the two accused alone, that any witnesses who may travel from Libya will have safe passage and immunity from arrest for any offence committed before arrival in the Netherlands, and that sanctions will be suspended when the two accused arrive in the Netherlands for trial. We want Libya to understand that we are acting in good faith.

In response to his question, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we have provided that clarification through the good offices of Kofi Annan as United Nations Secretary-General. That was foreseen in the Security Council resolution. It is important because it provides transparency and an additional assurance to the Libyans that we mean what we say. What we say is there for all to see.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Why are sanctions being suspended rather than terminated?

Mr. Lloyd: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will address several of the issues that he has raised, but first I shall run through the main points about the process in which we are engaging.

We want a transparent process. It is helpful if the process is dealt with through the Secretary-General, because that makes it clear that Lockerbie is not simply a bilateral British-Libyan operation, or even an issue between the United States and Libya, but is now of international interest. The will of the international community, unanimously expressed through the Security Council, is that Libya should accept the terms of the Security Council resolutions.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we should enter into discreet negotiations with Libya. However, the families of those who died on Pan Am flight 103 demand to know the truth. Secret bilateral deals would not help them, and are not necessary. The channel of communication through the Secretary-General has worked well in providing Libya with the information sought, and we have answered fully every question put to us.

The hon. Gentleman asked me several questions, and I shall try to answer them. There is no formal time limit on the process, but he will realise that that does not mean that we can wait around indefinitely for a response. The offer was made in good faith, and good faith on the other side demands some reciprocity, which we have yet to see.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the location of the trial. It is true that the place is a former air base that was used by, among others, the United States. That does not happen now and has not happened for some time. There are no United States troops there now, and the area is sovereign Dutch territory again. Even the Libyans do not now see its former role as a major obstacle.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the costs of the trial. Various estimates can be made, but it is a measure of the spirit in which the Lord Advocate and the Foreign Secretary entered into the process that cost was not an issue. Justice is the issue. Yes, the suggested trial will be significantly more expensive than a trial in Scotland, but because we are determined to seek proper justice, costs are not a determining factor. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that assurance.

I was also asked whether the agreement with the Dutch could be rewritten or unwritten. That agreement is underwritten by an Order in Council, and as it is of the nature of a treaty, it is not amendable. None the less, it is inconceivable that a process that has been transparent could be altered without the alteration being equally transparent. I hope that, even if the hon. Gentleman is cynical about what the British Government might do, he would accept that the Dutch Government come here with clean and honest hands. There would be no reason why they should want to amend a treaty for nefarious purposes at a later stage.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the suspension of sanctions. The Security Council resolution is specific on that point, and says that, when the two accused are delivered to The Hague for trial, sanctions will be suspended. I assume that the hon. Gentleman fears that sanctions will somehow be reimposed later, but it would be incredible if we tried to get away with that in the court of world opinion.

I can reassure the hon. Gentleman further. Even if that were the hidden agenda of the British Government, once sanctions had been suspended, a decision by the Security Council would be required to alter the sanctions regime from suspension. Neither the British nor the Americans could do that; it would require action by the whole Security Council. That is a protection for the Libyans.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the allegations by Mr. Shayler. It is far from unknown for those who seek to make money out of their former careers to go way beyond the bounds of fact and enter a world of romance, and the Foreign Secretary has made it clear that there is no truth in the allegations. I stand by that statement, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman openly that neither under previous Governments nor under the present Government has there been any shred of evidence to support Mr. Shayler's allegations.

I shall almost repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has already told the House about the case of WPC Fletcher, when I say that it is under active investigation by the Metropolitan police, who will report to the Home Secretary when their findings are complete. There is no connection between the Lockerbie situation, involving the trial and the sanctions, and the case of WPC Fletcher. It is important that the House and the world know that.

We want the WPC Fletcher case to be resolved. We still believe that the action was committed by the Libyan authorities, and it would be helpful if the Libyans conceded that point and accepted liability for compensation. That would be a positive step forward in building good faith.

We have already provided clarification, and I have, I hope, provided some more today. In principle, clarification about the trial process has been provided through the offices of the United Nations Secretary-General. We have not taken those steps lightly, and they are not merely a gesture. We are serious; we want a trial before a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands, so that this distressing issue can be brought to an end.

We have done, and are still doing, everything possible to ensure that outcome. We introduced the necessary changes to Scots law by Order in Council on 16 September, and the Foreign Secretary has told the House that an agreement between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands was signed on 18 September. We want to make progress, and we are confident that in proposing to agree with the Government of the Netherlands on an early date for the agreement to enter into force, we are acting with the will of the House. Work is under way to prepare the trial site. All we need now is a positive response from the Libyans.

I want to reiterate that sanctions are not designed to punish the Libyan people. It is neither our wish nor our intention to keep Libya under UN sanctions indefinitely for some undefined political purpose. The UN sanctions have a legitimate purpose—they are designed and mandated by the UN Security Council to press Libya to fulfil its obligations under UN resolutions. When Libya conforms to the resolutions, sanctions can be brought to an end.

I hope that the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East takes my words to heart. We will support the suspension of sanctions in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1192 when the accused arrive in the Netherlands for trial. Given the purpose of sanctions and the way in which we propose to make progress, it would be wrong and illogical—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. It is time for the next debate.

West Hertfordshire Health Authority

1.30 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Very often, an Adjournment debate can be a lonely business, with sometimes just oneself and somebody else on the Front Bench. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to come here accompanied by a box which contains the signatures of some 35,610 objectors to various plans made by West Hertfordshire health authority. I understand that another 36,000 people from Watford are similarly inclined to object to the use made by the authority of the private finance initiative.

In asking for a debate on this matter, I was not trying to be a fundamentalist about the use of the PFI. In my constituency, I have been desperate to try to get a new initiative for a matter on which the public authorities seem to have become locked into inaction. In particular, I am trying to get a road from St. Albans road in Hemel Hempstead—a dual carriageway—into the wonderful new £5 million accident and emergency unit at Hemel Hempstead hospital. I hope to get that road, and I will be happy to trade with anyone in the private sector who wishes to provide the necessary expertise, energy and financial input.

Sometimes, the PFI might allow one to get something done which previously was not being done. However, looking at the Government's strategy for health, I am forced to suggest to the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) that perhaps there is a conflict between the untrammelled operation of the PFI and the Government's strategy for improving health care. After all, the Government want to invest in a better NHS. Indeed, they have made £21 billion available for that investment over the next three years.

We all want that investment to be used for the kind of capital investment that would achieve substantial revenue savings. For instance, a hospital that is poorly insulated is often in that condition because of desperate neglect over many years. If the insulation is improved in a poorly insulated hospital with a high energy bill, revenue savings will be made. In the case of the general hospital in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward), such neglect has resulted in a backlog of repairs of some £7 million. That ought to be rectified by a Government who are committed to investing in the NHS. If the insulation is improved in a poorly insulated hospital with a high energy bill, revenue savings will be made.

Revenue savings can also be made by appropriate investment in information technology. Revenue savings can be made—this is a case close to my heart—by trying to improve nurses' accommodation, so that they are attracted to living near a town centre hospital, such as Hemel Hempstead or Watford, where medical staff have the amenities of a town centre, and of affordable housing. Where such investment in accommodation has been made, the health trust will not have to pay ludicrous amounts to get or to manage temporary or agency staff.

Revenue savings can lead to real improvements in health, and I commend the Government's strategy for investment. Capital investment initiatives can lead to a virtuous circle, in which hospitals and trusts begin to think of real improvements in the quality of care they give their

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patients. In Hertfordshire, there is the possibility of a link with the newly emerging health faculty at the university of Hertfordshire, which could lead to the county becoming an attractive place for practitioners and nurses to work. I shall be having lunch with the current vice-chancellor of the university after this debate to discuss that very matter.

I understand the strategy adopted by the Government, but the strategy adopted by West Hertfordshire health authority seems to be about as far removed from the Government's as it is possible to imagine. To start with, the authority wants to attack the five hospitals that are built, operating and functioning. These include hospitals in Hemel Hempstead and Watford—I am sorry that the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) is not here to defend Mount Vernon hospital—which have produced more than 70,000 people who support their retention. The people of west Hertfordshire are worried by the prospect that the wonderful deposit of NHS resources, built up since the start of the NHS in 1948, might be frittered away on the PFI-inspired philosophy of the health authority.

The PFI is inappropriate for our current circumstances. A House of Commons research paper on the matter states that the need for the private finance initiative was initially put in place so that up-front capital funding for new developments was replaced with a long-term revenue commitment by the public sector. It said that no longer would the NHS own an asset—it would lease it. Assets that were publicly held would be lost.

That is not the situation in which we find ourselves. The Government want to make capital investment and to save on revenue—yet the PFI points the other way.

Despite the language of the West Hertfordshire health authority—which talks about a "new super-hospital"—the proposal represents a substantial cut in the facilities available to the people of west Hertfordshire. According to the authority's figures, there will be a cut from 1,170 acute places to between 695 and 730. This cut is portrayed in the authority's documents as if it were somehow a benefit. If that is a benefit, I would rather do without it.

There is also the problem that the process has cost a huge amount of public money in consultation.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Is my hon. Friend aware that the health authority has conducted consultation, and that the response that it has received from the public—80,000 signatures collected by a pressure group—local Members of Parliament and the local authorities has shown that there is objection to the proposal and to the favoured option of the building of a new hospital?

Mr. McWalter: That is true, and the public's understanding of such matters often transcends that of hon. Members in this Chamber.

In the consultative process, it is unclear what the terms of reference of any PFI contract are to be. I do not know this to be the case, but what I call a "BOOT" system may be in operation—that is, build, own, operate and transfer. In such a case, at the end of the contract the assets are held by the private consortium. In west Hertfordshire, acute facilities at four hospitals could be downgraded and any number of them could close down, with the remaining community hospital at Harpenden closing as well. In west Hertfordshire, the operators of the NHS system have carte blanche, under their current plans, to do what they like with current assets.

Ms Ward: Does my hon. Friend agree that the objection of local people to the West Hertfordshire health authority is not necessarily an objection in principle to the PFI, but to the proposals that the authority has put forward? It has not made a case for its option, either financially or strategically.

Mr. McWalter: That is a good point, but the trouble with the PFI is that, when the previous Administration introduced it, it was a recipe for inactivity and for saving public money. This Government have made large amounts of money available for investment, and what worries many of us is that that investment could destroy public assets. In west Hertfordshire, we have the example of an asset that is held by the public—five hospitals. In 30 years' time, we could end up publicly not owning one brick or a trowel full of mortar.

Another important aspect is that the revenue projections of the process are extremely unclear. In a representation to the Treasury Select Committee two years ago, Christopher Bland, head of the private finance panel said that when he asked such questions as, "What are the revenue implications of the PFI contracts signed for, say, 2005?" Lo and behold, the answers were not forthcoming. We are in strong danger not only of losing public assets, but of buying an expensive pig in a poke.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I agree that the revenue projections are exceedingly shaky and that they have to be fleshed out in greater detail, but is not the basic reason why the process is taking place—unless the Minister is going to give us some good news at the Dispatch Box right now—that the Government will not give the money to maintain the status quo?

Mr. McWalter: The hon. Gentleman fails to recognise that the status quo is deeply unsatisfactory because the Conservative Government introduced an odious system called capital charges, which required all health operators to study their asset base and to make substantial payments—on average 9 per cent. of their income. West Hertfordshire health authority would not be in deficit if it were not for the capital charges—

Mr. Page: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the way in which capital charges are operated. If they were removed, we would have no problems in west Hertfordshire and could continue with the status quo.

Mr. McWalter: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support for what appear to me to be policies designed to ensure that public assets remain in the public sector, rather than the policies of the previous Government, who did their level best to ensure that a haemorrhaging of public assets into the private sector.

Apart from threatening the very fabric of the NHS in west Hertfordshire, the overall impact of the plans, assuming that we do not have the BOOT system and the asset is not transferred but is kept within the public sector through some devious route—possibly a joint venture in which each party gets 50 per cent., for example—would be that the asset base on which the health authority has to

pay capital charges would be greater than it is now, according to all the figures that I have seen. Therefore, the authority's deficit would be even larger. Therefore, implicit in its plans must be a substantial reduction in the asset base, which means that an awful lot of hospital closures that have not been accounted for must be in the pipeline.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that a conflict exists between retaining the PFI as, potentially, a force for squeezing out public sector holdings and assets, and retaining it for its potential to be used in new and improved schemes. It is a major mistake to retain a PFI that is designed to erode, compromise or put into joint venture holdings capital assets that are publicly owned.

Those matters are all relatively new, and many of us have been awaiting the comprehensive spending review to find out precisely what sort of shape we may be able to put the NHS in over the next few years. I have already said that I strongly welcome what the Government are doing in that regard, but there is a head-on conflict between substantial capital investment and continuing to keep the PFI, which could result in the haemorrhaging of the very resources that one wants to put at the disposal of the health service. We want a system of public investment and expenditure that is not designed to erode the very basis of health provision.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The reservations that my hon. Friend has expressed about private finance developments in Hertfordshire are shared by people in Birmingham, who are worried about private finance initiatives there. Resources are being diverted from care into paying for the raising of capital by private sector companies, which is more expensive than it would be in the public sector.

Mr. McWalter: My hon. Friend has a good point, and I hope that it will be considered. The present 20-year interest rate for public finance is 4.77 per cent., whereas the cheapest possible rate for private finance is more than 6 per cent. We are already faced with a spread or differential that makes it extremely difficult to manage the interest payments that will be required through such initiatives. That in itself represents a haemorrhaging of resources. I look forward to the Minister telling me that PFIs that have the capacity to undermine public assets and provision will not be welcome in his Department.

1.48 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I am happy to have the opportunity to respond to the debate launched by my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) and congratulate him on securing the time for it. The issue is of considerable concern to his constituents and, indeed, to some hon. Friends and other hon. Members in the Chamber.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government share his aim to provide a high-quality national health service for the people of this country, wherever they live. The national health service was founded on the principle that the very best health care should be available to everyone—a principle that the previous Government did their best to erode and which this Government are determined to restore.

We are doing that by modernising the national health service, by making its services faster and more convenient for patients, by tackling variations in quality, by improving standards and by developing integrated services around the needs of individual patients and across the traditional care boundaries. Above all, we are doing it by transforming the NHS from a sickness service into a service that works in partnership with others to reduce the appalling health inequalities that are a scar on our nation.

The Government's modernisation programme is extremely ambitious—it will take time and a great deal of money. From next April, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead rightly said, a record £21 billion of extra investments will start to come on line to help to modernise the NHS. All parts of the country will benefit.

The comments of the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) could not have been wider of the mark. The Government have made available extra investment over and above that planned by the Conservative Government. In the past 18 months, we have provided West Hertfordshire health authority with an extra £15.4 million. Moreover, we recently announced next year's allocations, which include a further £19 million for West Hertfordshire—a cash increase of 6.38 per cent., which I hope will be warmly welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. That money is necessary to modernise and sustain services.

The money is also necessary to sort out the mess that the Government inherited. When we came to office, 72 of 100 health authorities, including West Hertfordshire, were in deficit. Across the country, we reduced the total deficits in health authorities from £238 million to less than £20 million at the end of 1997–98. In West Hertfordshire, the deficit has been reduced from £4 million to less than £2 million.

The Government are delivering on their promise not only to save the NHS but to modernise it as well. I remind my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead that we were also elected on a manifesto promise to sort out the problems that have plagued the private finance initiative so that it could work for the benefit of the health service. We have delivered on that promise, too.

We inherited a PFI process under which no new hospitals had been built. A lot of money—£30 million, I think—had been spent on management consultant and legal fees, but no bricks had been laid and no bulldozers had been moved. Today, because of our actions, work has started on the construction of eight hospitals under PFI. Since we came to office, we have been able to announce the biggest new hospital building programme in the history of the NHS—31 new hospitals worth almost £2.4 billion, 25 of which will be built through PFI, with a total value of almost £2.2 billion.

We will give the go-ahead to PFI proposals only after it has been shown that they are affordable and offer taxpayers better value for money than a publicly funded alternative. Unlike the previous Government, we will not allow any clinical services to be included in a PFI deal. We are also making the whole PFI process more open, and we have considered how better to protect the interests of staff who are included in PFI deals.

I know that there are concerns, both in the House and beyond, about PFI in the NHS, but public-private partnerships are here to stay. As my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward) said, patients are not

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worried about whether hospitals are built through cash from the PFI or through cash from the Exchequer; their concern is, rightly, that new hospitals should be built.

The situation in west Hertfordshire is complex. The proposal to build a brand new hospital in the health authority's area has been submitted, with nine others, to the capital prioritisation advisory group. I established CPAG to advise me on which major hospital developments were most needed in the NHS—under our arrangements, NHS needs, not the whims of the private sector, but to decide where new hospitals will be built. I will shortly be considering CPAG's advice on the proposals in west Hertfordshire, but I will not give the go ahead to any new hospital unless it is part and parcel of a proper local plan for delivering and sustaining high-quality local health services.

Ms Ward: Will my hon. Friend assure me that he will not allow the proposals to be acted on until the health authority has answered the genuine points that have been raised by members of the public and the local authority and until it has investigated every other option, which it has so far failed to do?

Mr. Milburn: I shall speak about that in a moment. In the consultation process—in west Hertfordshire or anywhere else—I expect those who play a decision-making role in the NHS to listen seriously to what concerned patients, organisations and communities say. Inevitably, difficult decisions have to be taken, but I expect to see evidence that local concerns have been analysed extremely carefully.

Any proposal for local hospital developments must be part and parcel of a properly worked through local health plan to deliver quality and sustainable services. There have been far too many cases of ad hoc hospital developments, which have proved to be unsustainable precisely because they were not considered as part of the local configuration of services.

There is no final agreed plan for the make-up of local hospital or broader health services in west Hertfordshire. The health authority has consulted widely on its radical proposals for changes to hospital services. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead is aware, the health authority agreed at its public meeting on 30 October to take a staged approach in changing local health services. That was in response to the strength of local feeling and to the need to provide further information on the authority's proposals. Indeed, he and my hon. Friend the Member for Watford have reflected those concerns today.

As I understand the position, the South-West Hertfordshire community health council will formally object to the proposals, so the matter will be referred to Ministers. I am sure that my hon. Friends will understand that my position as a Minister prevents me from commenting on the proposals at the moment. If the local community health council formally objects to the proposals that the health authority adopts after the consultation period, the matter will be referred to me for a decision.

I assure my hon. Friends that the Department of Health is fully committed to the provision of high-quality, up-to-date treatment in a modern and responsive health service. If the matter is referred, Ministers will uphold the health authority's decision only if we are satisfied that adequate alternative services are available. I have heard what my hon. Friends have said and I assure them that their points will be borne fully in mind when we consider the matter. I also give the specific assurance that I will not approve any proposal through the CPAG process for a new hospital until Ministers have considered the make up of health services in the area.

I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead and others have said. I know that their concerns are shared by many people in the community. Difficult decisions have to be taken, not least because of the financial problems that the previous Government left in the health service.

My hon. Friend also knows that the NHS in west Hertfordshire and elsewhere cannot stand still. Progress in medical technology and in doctors' training and the alterations in our population and in public expectations are all driving change. No change is not an option for the NHS. Our job is to ensure that change delivers improvements in the care and treatment of patients. I assure him that any proposals for change in west Hertfordshire that the Government consider will be judged against that criterion.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

London Local Authorities Bill

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [17th November] as relates to the London Local Authorities Bill be now considered.

Resolved,

That this House doth concur with the Lords in their Resolution.—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister was asked—

Public Services (New Technology)

1. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): What plans he has to extend the use of new technologies by public services to improve their performance and allow greater access by the public. [58911]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I am pleased to announce that a contract has been signed with Cable and Wireless for delivering the xGSI, an extension to the Government secure intranet allowing for more highly classified networks to connect to it. The xGSI is a major breakthrough in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of how Departments and agencies can work together. From now on, it will be increasingly possible for the Government to conduct business over the Government secure intranet in more secure and cost-effective ways that will open up the possibility for greater electronic access to Government by both the public and the business community.

Mr. Chapman: I thank my hon. Friend, who is no doubt aware that the use of information technology in the public sector is a vast and still largely untapped means for the ordinary person to communicate with the Government and the public sector in general. Will he assure me that all possible steps will be taken to ensure that the ever-evolving technology is kept pace with and that the private sector—and not only Cable and Wireless—is appropriately engaged?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Indeed, I introduced the Computer Industry Consultative Committee at a conference at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre on 2 November, to maintain the dialogue between the industry and ourselves. Through the central information technology unit and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency, both of which operate within the Cabinet Office, we are in day-to-day contact with new developments in the industry.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): When this sexy network is completed, will the wires lead into the present office of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, or into a new office of considerable dimensions and cost? Perhaps the Minister could share that information with us.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The right hon. Gentleman is more than a little out of date, as a question was answered on that very subject yesterday—*Official Report*, column *452*. He demeans the serious question of how the Government communicate among themselves and with others. We seriously intend to take all measures necessary to ensure that we can do so effectively. I am sure that he is aware that the proposal to consolidate from seven buildings into one in Admiralty buildings preceded the advent of the Labour Government. The difference between us and the previous Government is that we are actually doing something about it.

Constitutional Reform

2. **Dr. Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): If he will make a statement on the responsibilities of the Cabinet Office in respect of the Government's policies for constitutional reform. [58912]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The Cabinet Office is responsible for ensuring the effective co-ordination and implementation of the Government's wide-ranging programme of constitutional reform. The Cabinet Office also has policy responsibility for advising Ministers on implementing the Government's proposals for reform of the House of Lords.

Dr. Wright: I am grateful for that answer. The Government are to be congratulated on their bold and ambitious programme of constitutional reform, soon happily to include the House of Lords, but is there not a difficulty, in that we have a big programme—11 Bills this year—but responsibility for it is spread among no fewer than eight Departments? Is it not time to make the Cabinet Office the Department of the constitution, driving the programme forward and making my right hon. Friend even more powerful than he is already?

Dr. Cunningham: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about the Government's fundamentally important constitutional reform programme, most of which, as he rightly said, has been delivered. The question whether to make the Cabinet Office and my role more powerful is not one on which I wish to comment, except to say that I believe we already have sufficient power and responsibility in the Cabinet Office to co-ordinate a process that, of necessity—given devolution to Scotland and Wales and changes to the European Parliament—involves a significant number of Departments of State.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Can the Minister confirm that the Bill to introduce a fairer system of voting for elections to the European Parliament is an integral and essential part of the Government's constitutional reform programme? Can he comment on the fact that the unelected seem to be prepared, at a late stage and after having taken no interest in the Bill during its Committee stage, to wreck the will of the elected?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, I can confirm both those points. It is the Government's intention to press ahead with our legislation in this area. As the hon. Gentleman said, it was clear that only a majority of hereditary peers prevented the will of the elected Chamber from prevailing in this matter. If Opposition Members want to assert the authority of the hereditary peerage over elected Members of the House of Commons, that is a battle that the Government are only too willing to fight.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The remit of the Cabinet Joint Consultative Committee, on which Liberal Democrat Members sit, is to be expanded to encompass welfare reform, Europe, health and education. Liberal Democrat Members are to receive classified documents

that are not available to all Government Members. Do Liberal Democrats have to sign the Official Secrets Act? What penalty will apply if any of the Liberal Democrats leak that confidential information?

Dr. Cunningham: Perhaps I can reassure my hon. Friend, in that what he said is not altogether accurate. There are simply to be discussions between the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and myself about the success of the co-operation between the Liberal Democrats and the Government in driving forward the shared constitutional agenda, to reflect on how the Joint Consultative Committee has operated in the past and to see whether it is possible to widen and/or deepen the process. Those decisions have not yet been taken. We have simply started the process, and one meeting has taken place.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In view of the right hon. Gentleman's overall responsibility for House of Lords reform—he has just told us about that—will he give an assurance to the House that every stage of any Bill on that subject will be taken on the Floor of the House?

Dr. Cunningham: As I have said, the Cabinet Office has policy responsibility for advising Ministers on taking forward the matter. I did not claim to have overall responsibility for the subject. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the issue raised in his question is not a matter for me.

Ministerial Replies

3. **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): If he will make a statement on progress in improving the timeliness and quality of ministerial replies from all Government departments to requests from hon. Members. [58913]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The Cabinet Office issued guidance last month to all Departments reminding them of the correct procedures to be followed when handling correspondence from hon. Members. Copies of the guidance have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The guidance emphasises the importance of setting robust and challenging targets for replying to letters from hon. Members and reminds Departments of the need to ensure that all replies are of a consistently high standard.

Mr. Pickthall: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that a great deal still needs to be done? For example, only this Monday, I received a reply to a letter I sent to a Department on 20 March this year. As we inflict league tables on schools, would my hon. Friend consider league tables for Departments? Perhaps there could be performance-related pay, the idea of an advanced skills civil servant and, possibly, "headlamp" training for Ministers.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I agree that the treatment that my hon. Friend received is not up to expectations, but I hope that it was the exception, not the rule. We are mindful of the need to improve target times for the turnround of correspondence. If we were to introduce performance-related pay and league tables for the House and apply them to the performance of the Opposition, they would end up paying money into the Exchequer and would face another relegation.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does the Minister accept that many of my Buckingham constituents, whose courtesy is unsurpassed anywhere in the United Kingdom, are justifiably irritated when they have regularly to wait a minimum of two months—sometimes much longer—before they receive ministerial replies? Further to the Minister's reply to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), does he agree that a reply, if it has taken at least two months to provide, should always be accompanied by an apology to the constituent from the Minister involved for its tardiness?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The guidance sets out clearly the responsibilities of Departments and Ministers. The guidance for the treatment of correspondence from members of the public is different from that for correspondence from hon. Members. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that correspondence from hon. Members is often more substantive and it takes longer for Departments to reply, but that is no excuse for not making a speedy response.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Let me press the Minister on his point about a speedy response. In response to a request dealing with central standards and decisions in the House, a card was received stating that the matter had been passed to the Northern Ireland Office. Surely such a request should be answered by a Minister in the Department to which it was addressed, not passed all around the world to the Northern Ireland Office and back again.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it makes sense that correspondents should have one initial point of contact for any request, and an explanation of the reasons behind it. The guidance makes clear the good practice that should be followed, but doing so is the responsibility of the Department concerned.

Drugs Misuse

4. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): If he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's priorities for reducing drugs misuse in 1998 and 1999. [58914]

6. **Mr. Hugh Bayley** (City of York): If he will make a statement about the Government's policies to curb the use of illicit drugs. [58918]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The Government's anti-drugs strategy, "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain", published in April this year, established a framework for action over the next 10 years. On 1 September, I announced £217 million of additional funding over the next three years for anti-drugs activities, in line with the strategy. Our long-term targets are to reduce drug misuse by young people, to reduce drug-related crime, to increase participation in drug treatment and to reduce the availability of drugs. Specific short and medium-term

targets will be in place by March 1999. Locally, drug action teams are now drawing up action plans for 1999–2000.

Mr. Hughes: I welcome those four targets. Will the Minister dwell on the last of them and ensure that his discussions are widened to bring in the Department of Health, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Education and Employment so that we have a culture that reduces the use of illegal drugs and the unnecessary use of all drugs, especially tobacco and alcohol?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support for what we are trying to achieve in our new strategy, but my responsibilities focus on illegal use of drugs. I would not for one moment deny the importance of the other issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, but they are not principally matters for me or for the Committee of Ministers, which I chair and which is doing just what he suggests in co-ordinating activity and action across Departments.

Mr. Bayley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it should be head teachers who decide whether to exclude a pupil if that pupil is found in possession of drugs? Does he agree that the decision should reflect the individual circumstances of the case?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, I agree. My hon. Friend simply reflects accurately what was said yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): In his role of co-ordinating policy across Government, will the Minister ensure that the clear, unequivocal message against the use of illegal drugs is consistent? Perhaps he might have a word with the Prime Minister to ensure that his right hon. Friend does not in future invite to Downing street personalities such as those from the pop music world who are known to take drugs and who set such a poor example to the young who idolise them.

Dr. Cunningham: I begin by congratulating the right hon. Lady—

Mrs. Winterton: Hon. Lady.

Dr. Cunningham: I beg her pardon.

Mrs. Winterton: Only a matter of time.

Dr. Cunningham: It is, indeed, only a matter of time. I congratulate the hon. Lady on her new position on the Front Bench, and I thank her for her co-operation in taking a non-partisan approach to these issues. I hope that the shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment will also revert to taking that non-partisan approach on the illegal use of drugs. We are concerned with the impact of drugs on children and young people, and that simply is not a party political issue.

I am very pleased to be able to say that the Prime Minister's guest lists for 10 Downing street are not a matter for me and fall within none of my responsibilities.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his efforts to reduce use of illegal drugs. Will he join me in congratulating the groups which have come together over the past three years in Paisley, North to fight the menace of drugs, and which, by doing so, have reduced violent crime by 36 per cent. over that period? Does my right hon. Friend agree that only when every section of the community comes together can that kind of progress be made?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, I agree. We are willing and determined to work with local drugs action teams and other organisations, and I pay tribute to them. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the courageous stance that she has consistently taken in her constituency and in wider Scottish debates.

Civil Service (Independence)

5. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What new measures he plans to take to ensure the independence of the Civil Service. [58916]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The role of the civil service, as summarised in the "Civil Service Code", is to assist the duly constituted Government of the day with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity. We intend to bring forward legislation to give statutory force to the code as and when a suitable opportunity occurs. The "Ministerial Code" requires Ministers to uphold the political impartiality of the civil service.

Mr. Swayne: Does the Minister believe that the taxpayer is getting value for money for Alastair Campbell at £90,000 a year for a job which the Prime Minister describes as one of attacking the Opposition, and which the press are increasingly discovering to be one of concealing information, or providing misleading information?

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is arrant nonsense to talk about the Government concealing information, certainly about the role of the chief press spokesman for the Prime Minister and those in similar posts. We have set out clearly and publicly to place presentation at the heart of Government. We have made it clear, and we make no apology for saying, that we shall drive our agenda forward from the centre in a way that will not compromise the political impartiality of civil servants. That is the role of special advisers.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend aware that, after 18 years in which it was said that the only question asked of any civil servant was, "Is he one of us?", Labour Members not only expect the Government to maintain the independence of the civil service but strongly believe that that is the only way in which the interests of the public will be preserved?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I could not but agree with my hon. Friend. The use of special advisers in certain matters means that we avoid the dangers, which many people would allege that the previous Government strayed into, of politically compromising regular civil servants. We have no intention of doing that.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Was not my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West

(Mr. Swayne) right to focus on the independence of the civil service and to draw attention to the injury done to that tradition of impartial civil servants by the Government doubling the number of special advisers and giving them pay increases way above the average of those given to other civil servants? If one sets that centralising tendency against all the others displayed by the Government, are we not right to conclude that the country needs not more central enforcement from the Minister for the Cabinet Office, but less?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Let me make it clear to the right hon. Gentleman that we said at the outset that the Government would place the drive for implementing our programme at the very heart of Government. That is why, in July, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reconfigured the Cabinet Office. We have also clearly and unequivocally said what role we expect special advisers to fulfil. I point out to the right hon. Gentleman, who mentioned costs, that the average salary paid to a special adviser under the present Government is £1,000 less than the previous Government paid their special advisers.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Has my hon. Friend read the remarkable article by the Prime Minister in the new issue of *Prospect* magazine, in which he asserts the independence and integrity of the civil service and invites civil servants to think across Departments, learn from mistakes, extend boundaries rather than protect turf, and work closely with their European counterparts to advance the interests of the nation and the Government? Will my hon. Friend distribute copies of that article throughout the civil service to encourage initiative and independence and acknowledge its contribution to good government of our nation?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of the occasion on which that speech was made. I am sure that it was so inspirational that, if we made copies available, even Conservative Members would be moved to recognise the Prime Minister's commitment to joined-up government, better government and an efficient civil service. That commitment was certainly recognised by the members of the senior civil service who were present when the speech was made.

Economic and Monetary Union

7. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): What consultations he has held with Cabinet colleagues over the presentation of Government policy towards European economic and monetary union. [58919]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that textual criticism about whether the Chancellor or the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said "if" or "when" is superfluous because they are united on the promotion of the euro, if on nothing else? Will he admit to the House that the real agenda for his party and his Government was spelled out in the document "The European Way", initiated during the Government's presidency of the European Union, which suggests a minimum level of taxation for companies and savings, or, in other words, further imposts on British jobs that would further damage British competitiveness?

Dr. Cunningham: I can certainly confirm that the Government's position on the single currency has not changed. We wish it to be a success; we shall test our position on joining it on the basis of jobs, investment and what is good for British industry and the economy; and if the Government decide that we should join, we shall put that decision to Parliament and to the people of this country.

As for differences in respect of the document that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, that is not a Government-to-Government document, but a document from a party of European socialists who are working towards a manifesto. It does not commit the Government specifically to anything. It is a draft working document. It is not surprising that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer supports that work, because, as the hon. Gentleman accurately said, it commenced under my right hon. Friend's chairmanship during the British presidency of the European Union.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend know that, in my constituency, a large number of businesses are expressing a positive approach towards the prospect of Britain eventually joining the euro? They have changed their attitude over the past two or three years. Is he further aware that the co-operation on policy on a pan-European basis that is being pursued by the party of European Socialists is in marked contrast to the narrow-minded isolationism and nationalist xenophobia on the Conservative Benches?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. He highlights the disarray in the Conservative party on Britain's role in Europe, and the Conservatives' general disarray on policy. The Leader of the Opposition disagrees with the shadow Chancellor, who disagrees with the shadow spokespeople on education and health. It is a shambles.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): When the Minister consults his colleagues on the matter, will he make a point of reminding them that repeated opinion polls have shown that only one third of the British people favour economic and monetary union, whereas well over half of them oppose it? Will he ensure that lashings of Government money are not expended on bogus arguments about the inevitability of something that a heavy majority of the British people rightly reject?

Dr. Cunningham: The Government will present our case for what is best for Britain to the British people in a consistent and wholly proper and prudent manner.

Executive Agencies

8. **Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): What new powers he is proposing for executive agencies. [58920]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The levels of delegation to agency chief executives under the next steps initiative are a matter for the Minister to whom he or she reports and will vary according to the size and function of the agency. The Government's general approach is to encourage initiative within a clear framework of targets and delegations set by the responsible Ministers.

Mr. Cousins: Will the programme for the modernisation of the state that the Government have in hand include allowing agencies to raise money sensibly, to act as beacon public enterprises and to be fairly and directly responsible to Parliament?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We are looking at all available options with respect to the functions of the agencies. It is a matter for constant review. Recently, there was a conference of the chief executives of the agencies to explore some of the points raised by my hon. Friend.

Ecstasy

9. **Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): What consultation he has had with the anti-drugs co-ordinator on policies on the use of ecstasy. [58921]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The Government's anti-drugs strategy, "Tackling Drugs Together to Build a Better Britain", outlines action to tackle all illegal drugs, including Ecstasy.

Ms Stuart: Given that evidence clearly suggests that young people respond to factual information when they consider the use of such drugs as Ecstasy, will my right hon. Friend make sure that the information on long-term brain damage associated with such drugs is made widely available not just to schools and children, but to their parents?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, we shall do that in the course of developing our 10-year strategy to tackle drug abuse in this country. Some of the £217 million in additional expenditure that I announced a few weeks ago will be targeted as my hon. Friend requests: it will be spent on further programmes of education, advice and information.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Minister accept that the Government's so-called anti-drugs strategy is failing? Will he not therefore set up a royal commission to examine the uses and effects of all illegal drugs?

Dr. Cunningham: No, I do not accept that—and neither does the Liberal Democrat health spokesman, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who has said positive things about the Government's drugs strategy. If the Liberal Democrats cannot agree among themselves about their party's position on this subject, I cannot take their comments very seriously.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [58891] **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 18 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Valerie Davey: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the young people at a Bristol comprehensive school that was visited today by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment have a clearer understanding of democracy and the importance of elections than do the anachronistic hereditary members of the House of Lords?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I fully agree. It is not merely the fact that the hereditary peers can decide policy in the House of Lords, but that the in-built Tory majority—three to one—in the other place means that, whatever the election result, the House of Lords can overturn the will of the House of Commons. That is not democracy.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Of the 20 Labour Back Benchers who have spoken in the House and in Committee about the closed-list system for European elections, how many have spoken in favour of it?

The Prime Minister: Nobody voted—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Nobody voted against it. In the House of Lords—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: Just to correct what the Leader of the Opposition said this morning: although he tried to pretend that it was a broad-based alliance in the House of Lords, only 21 of the votes against the Government in the House of Lords last night were not cast by Tories or hereditaries. That shows them in their true colours.

Mr. Hague: The question was: how many Labour Back Benchers in the House have voted for closed lists? Why does the Prime Minister not ask one of the Chinese mystics to whom he is turning to teach him the ancient art of answering the question? The answer is that one Labour Back Bencher has spoken in favour of closed lists in the House—and even he spoke against them in Committee.

Labour Members are too embarrassed to speak in favour of a closed-list system, and the Prime Minister is too embarrassed to admit that they are embarrassed. Why does he not admit that the Cross-Bench peers voted against the Government last night, that the Law Lords voted against the Government, and that all the bishops who were present voted against the Government? Will the

Prime Minister acknowledge that all independent opinion is against a voting system that denies the voters the right to vote for the candidate that they prefer?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not accept that at all. As I have just said, quite contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition is telling people, only 21 of the votes upon which he relied last night were not cast by Tories or hereditaries. Supporting the Labour party's position were the Liberal Democrats, Cross Benchers—*[Interruption.]* So the Tory party is happy to rely on hereditary peers, but not on Liberal Democrats. Well, I prefer the support of people elected by the people, not hereditary peers—that is the answer. I think it fascinating that Conservative Members count the hereditary peers as more important than people who are democratically elected.

The system that we are proposing brings us into line with other European countries; it is our manifesto commitment. It is wrong to say that it does not list the candidates; the ballot paper lists parties and candidates. The system is used for France, Germany, Spain, Greece and Portugal. The only countries that use the Tories' system are Finland and Sweden. This, however, is no longer about the system; it is about the hereditary Tory peers in the House of Lords.

May I give the right hon. Gentleman some advice, as I know that he is in need of an image consultant at the moment? The right image for him is not to wrap himself in the ermine of hereditary peers.

Mr. Hague: It has come to something when the only independent support that the Prime Minister can find is from the Liberal party, which last week was not meant to be independent at all. It is funny that, when the Lords defeated the previous Government on their Criminal Justice Bill, the shadow Home Secretary of the time said:

"This is a resounding victory for common sense."

Who was the shadow Home Secretary? The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). There was no whining about an affront to democracy on that occasion, was there?

The Prime Minister is having difficulties with his questions today. He has his file with him; why does he not read out what his beloved Jenkins committee said about closed and open lists?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to do that—the right hon. Gentleman can read it out, and he can ask his own questions. Under the system that we are proposing, we will give away seats, both to Liberal Democrats and to the Tories—it is an act of generosity on our part. If he wants to end up using his hereditary majority in the House of Lords to overturn that, that is a matter for him. The Tories have the power to do that in the House of Lords—they can frustrate the will of the House of Commons. But if he does that, and we go back to the old system of first past the post—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."]—which I think some of my hon. Friends—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman has even managed to make me loved by the Labour party.

If we go back to the old system of first past the post, we will watch with delight as the right hon. Gentleman's candidates fight each other for selection. If he uses the House of Lords to overturn the will of the democratically elected House of Commons, and to overturn a system that is used by two thirds of citizens in the European Union, that will show, first, that he has the strategic vision of a bat—because that will do his party more harm than any other party—and, secondly, that when it comes to democracy, the Tories prefer hereditary peers to the will of the people.

Mr. Hague: Is it not fascinating that the Prime Minister has so few arguments to advance his case? I am so sorry that he cannot read from the Jenkins report—Lord Jenkins will be most put out—but fortunately, I have a copy: never travel without it. Lord Jenkins says:

"it is crucial that the voters' right to express their view of individual candidates should be maintained . . . For this reason we greatly prefer an open list, to a closed party list".

So every independent person can see what the Prime Minister cannot see—that the real affront to democracy is his plan to deny the voters the right to vote for a candidate whom they prefer. Is he not overriding every word of caution and every constitutional check and balance to expand the power of his clique of cronies at the expense of the power of the people?

The Prime Minister: First, Lord Jenkins voted with us rather than with the Conservatives. Secondly, what the right hon. Gentleman is saying is that there is no argument in favour of the list system that we are putting forward. As I have pointed out, the vast majority of people in the European Union vote according to the system that we are putting forward. It is the system that is used by most large countries. Under the system that the right hon. Gentleman is putting forward, a candidate with fewer votes could get elected over someone with more votes, which is plainly absurd.

In any event, the right hon. Gentleman has never dealt with the essential point: is the will of the House of Commons the will that should be upheld, or is it the will of the Tory hereditary peers? Perhaps he can get up and admit that it is only with Tory hereditary peers that he comes anywhere near winning this vote. That is the real issue: Conservatives' support of hereditary peers, or our support for an elected House of Commons.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister knows that that is not the case. If he looks at the figures that he has in front of him, he will see that 47 Cross-Bench peers voted with the Opposition and 12 with the Government. The three bishops voted with the Opposition and not with the Government. Four Law Lords and ex-Law Lords voted with the Opposition and not with the Government. If those people had voted the other way round, the Government would have been successful. The reason why the Prime Minister lost in the House of Lords is that he lost the argument—and he has lost the argument in the House of Commons as well.

The Prime Minister: No, the right hon. Gentleman is wrong. Without Tory hereditary peers, he would have come nowhere near winning the vote. The truth is that he wins only through Tory hereditary peers. What he has done today is to decide not merely against his own party's interest, but to use Tory hereditary peers to frustrate the will of the House of Commons. That is his choice, and he will live with its consequences.

Q2. [58892] **Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I was not sent here by the voters of Norwich, North to be dictated to by a bunch of in-bred, homozygous recessives.

It is estimated that one in two people in this country will contract cancer by 2010. Does the Prime Minister agree that we need to tackle its causes—asbestos, tobacco and other agents? Does he further agree that the inequalities throughout this country in care and in the treatment and detection of cancers are not consistent with the modern society that we are going to construct? Does he now agree that the time for Britain against cancer has come, and that part of the success story in the United States—a national cancer institute—might be an element of our plan?

The Prime Minister: It may be part of our plan, but already, as my hon. Friend will know, we are putting some £20 billion into the health service—that is extra—from next April; that is opposed, of course, by the Conservative party. The Government have guaranteed that everyone with suspected cancer will be seen by a specialist within two weeks of their general practitioner referring them as an urgent case, so we are not just putting that extra money in: we are directing some of those extra resources to cancer.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on all the work that he has done in campaigning on the issue. We are also going to ensure, of course, through the £2.5 billion hospital-building programme, that we get the right buildings and infrastructure as well.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful for that expression of support from both sides—truly non-tribal.

As we are discussing actions in Committee, is the Prime Minister aware that, when open lists in the European elections were debated in Committee in the House of Lords, the Conservatives refused to vote in favour of them and the Conservative spokesman claimed that open lists were "manifestly unfair"? Is this not absolutely clearly an example of extraordinary opportunism and double standards on the part of the Conservative party? Worse, is there not now a risk that the actions of the hereditary peers will deny the voters of Britain a fair electoral system for the European elections—a system for which two thirds of them voted in last year's general election?

The Prime Minister: Of course that is true. It is a manifesto commitment on the part of the Government that is being frustrated.

I have just turned up the figures relating to hereditary peers. The largest single group voting with the Conservatives were hereditary peers, who made up just over half the vote. As I have said, if we put Tories and hereditary peers together, we find that there were only 21 other votes. Talk of the great so-called cross-party and Cross-Bench alliance is absolute and utter nonsense.

What the right hon. Gentleman says is true: the system represents a manifesto commitment. Under the system that we propose, the ballot paper will list parties and candidates, so it is nonsense to suggest that voters will not know which group of people they are voting for. Our system would bring us into line with the majority view in the rest of the European Union—but the Opposition do not care about the manifesto commitment; they are more interested in using hereditary peers to frustrate the will of this place.

Mr. Ashdown: So does the Prime Minister agree that the proper constitutional process now would be for both Houses to pass the European Parliamentary Elections Bill today, on the basis that the Government will ensure that the review that they have already promised will take place after next year's elections will be conducted by an independent body such as the electoral commission proposed by Lord Neill? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will have order. Three Members, whom I could name, are shouting their heads off. It must stop.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Government ensure that the review will be conducted not by the Government, but by an independent body such as the electoral commission proposed by Lord Neill and supported by the Conservative party, which will then be able to recommend appropriate improvements and a more open procedure for subsequent elections?

The Prime Minister: That is a perfectly good suggestion. We have made it clear throughout that we are happy to arrange an independent review. The suggestion is intelligent, but we have an Opposition who are not interested in the issue at all. What they are interested in doing is using the issue to make a point of their own about the House of Lords. I happen to think that they are not making a very sensible point. As I have said, under the system that we propose ours will be the party that gives up seats. I think the Conservatives will find that their short-term diddling will lead to quite a long-term problem for them.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): And now for something completely different.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the board of Vaux, which employs 670 people in Sunderland and a couple of hundred in Sheffield, is putting its brewing interests on the market? Although the two companies concerned are profitable, and although Vaux has received a bid from its own management to run the companies as a going concern, it is contemplating selling them to one of its rivals, which will close them down, sack the work force and thereby eliminate a competitor. I know that we are all supposed to believe in market forces nowadays, but does my right hon. Friend agree that such action would represent the unacceptable face of capitalism?

The Prime Minister: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, and the fact that people are worried about their jobs. I am sure that those people will take account of my hon. Friend's powerful case. As he knows, the decision is not one for Government, but I am aware that he has made his case to those concerned, and I hope that they will listen carefully.

Q3. [58893] **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): How many times must the Paymaster General fail to register his financial interests before the Prime Minister has the courage to sack him from the Government?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General will make his statement after

Question Time. I hope that the House will allow him to do so. The Committee has made findings, to which he will respond. He should be left to respond to those findings. As my right hon. Friend has already pointed out, this refers to a time before he was a Minister. He accepts that it was an oversight on his part, and I think that the House should listen carefully to what he has to say.

Q4. [58894] **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): Will the Prime Minister—in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on the latest literacy and numeracy initiatives—urge him and all Departments to press ahead with expenditure in areas that will promote social inclusion? Will he congratulate my own borough of Blackpool on appointing a reader in residence in their schools, to promote reading among parents and children? Will the Prime Minister emphasise again to the House that such actions demonstrate the Government's commitment to public expenditure and to social inclusion, as opposed to the social exclusion practised by the House of Lords?

The Prime Minister: There are three things that we are doing for people in the position of my hon. Friend's constituents. We are putting £19 billion extra into education next year; ensuring that there is the new deal for young unemployed and long-term unemployed—our action has resulted in youth unemployment for over six months being cut by between 30 per cent. and 40 per cent.; and introducing the working families tax credit, which will improve the earnings of low income families. The three measures will help constituents—such as those of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members—throughout the land. All three measures are opposed by today's Conservative party, and nothing could better demonstrate the difference between us.

Q5. [58896] **Mr. Humfrey Malins** (Woking): Is the Prime Minister now aware that his continued support for the closed-list system is seen by so many as one more example of his contempt for the democratic process and for the electors of the United Kingdom, and as further evidence of the Government's desire to control, control and control?

The Prime Minister: On a point of fact, all the systems that have been discussed—all of them—are list systems that parties put into effect. As I said, the list system that we are proposing is used by most of the large countries in the European Union. The idea that we are proposing something that has never been heard of before is therefore absurd. The system was, of course, pioneered in the United Kingdom—in Northern Ireland, by the Conservative party.

Surely the democratic monstrosity is not the House of Commons deciding that one variant of the PR system is the best, but the Conservative party using its permanent in-built majority of Conservative hereditary peers—elected by no one and accountable to no one—to overturn the democratic majority in the House. That is how the vast majority of people will see it.

Q6. [58898] **Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe** (Leigh): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcement last week of £1.24 billion extra for police forces has been received with acclamation by both police and public? Is he aware that there is a growing appreciation among the British people of the fact that our Labour Government are determined to defeat crime at every possible opportunity, reinforcing once again the public's confidence in Labour's tough policies on crime?

May I also tell my right hon. Friend that certain chief constables are essentially scaremongering about their budgets? If the chief constable of Manchester is right in prophesying that his police authority's budget—which he has not yet received—will be short to the tune of £18 million, 224 police support jobs will have to go. Would it not be complete folly if we failed to find a few million extra quid to avoid major damage to our police force, so that we do not undermine our successful policies in dealing with crime?

The Prime Minister: There is a lot of negotiation at about this time of year on budgets. However, no allocations have yet finally been made. We are quite considerably increasing the police budget. My hon. Friend drew attention also to policies on law and order, particularly those on youth justice and crime and disorder. This Government, unlike the previous one, are not only being tough on crime but—through the new deal—tackling the underlying causes of crime. It is important to get both parts of that equation right.

Q7. [58899] **Mr. Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon): If the Prime Minister is serious about securing economic stability, does he accept that it requires not just an independent Bank of England, but a strategy for stabilising exchange rates and bringing our interest rates closer into line with already low European rates? Is not that failure of policy the reason why today's Treasury survey of independent economic forecasts shows that manufacturing industry is predicted to decline sharply next year, contrary to the Chancellor's forecasts? Is he now so confident that manufacturing industry will avoid recession in 1999?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear—indeed, I made it clear a couple of days ago—that industry and jobs face a tougher time in the next year. The question is: what is the right way to get through this? We believe that Bank of England independence and keeping tight control of fiscal policy—which we have done, slashing the enormous budget deficit that we inherited from the Conservatives—are the right things to do. If we combine them with measures to improve working conditions for people, such as the working families tax credit and the new deal, on which the OECD report today specifically congratulates us, we have the best chance of weathering the storm. The difference between us and the Liberal Democrats is that, although they want interest rates down, they want spending massively increased.

Mr. Bruce *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but on any basis they do. It is important that we get the right mix of monetary and fiscal policy. I believe that we have done that. That is why long-term interest rates are at their lowest for more than 30 years. Holding our nerve and staying firm on the policies that we have set out provides the best chance for this country to come through in the next 12 months.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I am a firm supporter of the first-past-the-post system, and am

utterly delighted that the suicide club on the Conservative Front Bench and their cronies along the Corridor are determined to maximise the number of Labour Members of the European Parliament and minimise the number of Tory MEPs. As attempts are being made to label my right hon. Friend a control freak—something that I have been told to say is completely alien to his nature—does it not strike him as bizarre that the unelected Chamber along the Corridor is trying to block his attempts to minimise the number of Labour MEPs who could be elected on a first-past-the-post system, thereby seeking to disperse power, authority and representation away from his Front Bench?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes an immensely persuasive case. Our proposal means that we would give away seats in the European elections next year. If the Conservatives wish to take us down another route, that is a matter for them. However, as my right hon. Friend implies, it is wrong for them to use hereditary Conservative peers to do so.

Q8. [58900] **Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton): On Monday, the Prime Minister told the City that he found economic stability sexy. Does he realise that British business would find him rather more sexy if he stopped flirting with Europe and made up his mind on the euro? When will the Prime Minister stop teasing British firms with his ifs and his buts, commit himself—and make a date?

The Prime Minister: I believe in a sustained period of wooing before relationships are entered into. What business wants above all is to know that the Government are going to hold to Bank of England independence and tight fiscal policy, making the additional investment in infrastructure, schools and hospitals next year.

In the past few weeks the Conservatives have provided the country with a simple choice. They would scrap Bank of England independence, they oppose our investment in schools and hospitals next year, they would scrap the working families tax credit and they would scrap the new deal. That is their decision. Business has a clear choice. And, of course, the Conservatives would rule out the euro for—is it two Parliaments or 10 years?

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Longer.

The Prime Minister: I cannot wait for the Euro-selection contests to begin in the Tory party.

There is a simple choice, and business knows it. It now has a clear choice between this Government, who are pursuing the right policies for long-term stability, and a Conservative party that would return us to boom and bust.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that his Government have brought in good working practice such as the minimum wage and the working time directive, and are also striving for ethical trade? Is he aware of the fair trade initiative, which ensures that people in other countries get a decent wage and decent working conditions as they produce the products for us to consume here? Does he welcome the fact that many people in my constituency, including societies, community groups, Churches, schools and even my researchers, have all decided to choose fair trade products?

The Prime Minister: The principles behind the fair trade initiative are admirable, although as a Government we must be careful not to do anything that would inhibit free trade. I agree 100 per cent. with my hon. Friend about the minimum wage. Again, that represents a clear difference between ourselves and the Conservative party. We believe in minimum standards in the workplace, and think them fully consistent with a competitive economy; whereas the Conservatives oppose minimum standards such as the minimum wage. Workers will go into the next election knowing that, if they vote Conservative, the minimum wage will be withdrawn from them.

Bereavement Benefits

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): With your permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement on the next stage of our welfare reform programme.

We have already launched the new deal, the biggest ever investment by Government in jobs and training. We have begun to tackle child poverty, with the biggest ever rise in child benefit. We have introduced a national child care strategy. We are modernising our tax and benefits system to make work pay, with a new working families tax credit, which will benefit up to 1.5 million people, underpinned by the national minimum wage.

Three weeks ago, I set out wide-ranging reforms to disability benefits, giving more help for severely disabled people and those disabled early in life. We are modernising the system to ensure that benefits go to those for whom they were intended. All these reforms are driven by our central objective—work for those who can and security for those who cannot.

Today I am publishing a consultation paper on our proposals for the reform of bereavement benefits paid to people of working age. Copies of the consultation paper are available in the Vote Office. The reforms apply only to people of working age who lose their husbands or wives. Women already widowed, widows over state pension age, and war widows will continue to get the support that we give them now. They will not be affected by the reforms that I set out today.

My announcement is one in a series of long-term reforms that will form the basis of legislation at the earliest opportunity. However, today's proposals will not be introduced before April 2001, so as to allow time for implementation.

The system of bereavement benefits that we inherited is out of date. When it was introduced 50 years ago, most women did not work, certainly not after marriage. Today, seven out of 10 married women work—almost as many as the eight out of 10 married men who work. Today, 1.5 million women benefit from their late husband's pensions, compared with the 100,000 who did so 50 years ago. About 40 per cent. of the women currently getting widows benefit are in the top half of the income bracket. The world has changed, and the benefits system needs to reflect those changes.

The system also fails on four specific counts. First, it is unfair to men: 15,000 husbands bereaved each year get no help at all. That unfairness cannot continue, and it is already being challenged in the European Court of Human Rights—so doing nothing, as some urge, is not an option. Secondly, the system does not provide enough help with the immediate costs of bereavement, such as unpaid bills or funeral costs. Thirdly, money often goes to those who have the least need of it. Widows without children who have substantial incomes can get benefits for years, but a man—who may have growing children and modest means—gets nothing at all. Finally, the present system fails to support the poorest mothers on income support. Widows who have children to care for lose their benefit pound for pound, and so get no financial gain from their widows benefit.

The reforms that I am announcing today will change all that. Our reforms will, for the first time, get help to men who lose their wives, and on an equal footing with widows. They will provide extra financial help with immediate needs, such as funeral expenses.

We will continue to help those older people without children during the period immediately after bereavement and, as with our other reforms, our priority is to provide security for families with children, and to get the greatest help to the poorest. Our proposals will ensure the security of families with children, and we will do more for the poorest families and their children.

First, I can announce today that men who lose their wives will get help on the same basis as women who lose their husbands. We will go further—once the reforms are introduced, they will apply not only to newly bereaved widowers, but to those husbands with children already widowed. For the first time, we will be providing security for around 20,000 men and their children.

Secondly, I wish to refer to immediate help on bereavement. The loss of a husband or wife is traumatic, and a time of great need and anxiety. We recognise the need for immediate financial help. Indeed, it is one of the strengths of the current system that, on bereavement, a widow gets a £1,000 lump sum within four days. In my view, that payment is no longer high enough—the amount has not changed in 10 years—so, today, I can announce that we are doubling the lump sum cash payment to £2,000. We want to give more help with a range of costs, such as bills or the cost of a funeral.

Thirdly, we want to ensure that we get help to those who need it most. Today, long-term widows benefits may go to many who do not need them because they do not have the extra costs of bringing up children, or because they have good incomes from jobs, pensions or insurance. Some argue that those are grounds for abolishing the benefit completely, but we do not believe that that would be right. We recognise that financial support is needed in the period immediately after bereavement, so we will continue to provide a financial breathing space for bereaved spouses—aged 45 and over—who do not have dependent children by paying a weekly benefit, worth up to £64.70. The new bereavement allowance will be paid for six months only—providing transitional support at a time of particular need.

We also recognise that, for the generation of widows and widowers aged 55 or over at the time when the changes are introduced, special arrangements will be needed because it could be difficult for them to make new plans. I can announce today that anyone from that generation who qualifies for income support and who is widowed in the five years after the changes are introduced will get support worth the same amount as the current widows pension.

Fourthly, we are determined to ensure that the greatest help goes to those with greatest needs. Our reforms will continue to provide long-term financial help to bereaved parents with children. I can confirm that bereaved husbands and wives will continue to get a weekly benefit—currently worth, on average, £85—payable until their youngest dependent child leaves full-time further education. As with our other proposals, that help goes to both men and women who lose their spouse. However, we want to go further. We are determined to do more to

help people who need help most, and we will ensure that the system helps the poorest widows and widowers, and their children.

Today, I can announce that the poorest bereaved parents who are on income-related benefits and getting bereavement benefits will gain additional cash help worth up to an extra £10 a week—providing the greatest help to those with greatest needs. The reforms modernise the benefit, treat men and women equally, give immediate help where it is needed, give more help to the poorest and do not affect existing widows.

As with the reforms that I announced three weeks ago, the structural changes will deliver significant savings, of around £500 million in the long run. However, we will do so by ensuring that the greatest help goes to those with greatest needs, and, in the short term, we are spending £140 million more to meet real need. As society gets wealthier, the amount that we spend on the most vulnerable should increase—but benefits must go to those who need them most. We must give more help to those in greatest need. We are planning now for the needs of the future, to ensure that the system is affordable, fair and effective.

Some people will urge us to do nothing, and, yes, turning our backs on the failure of the current system would have been the easy option. However, the real scandal would be for a Government committed to social justice to ignore the unfairness, to ignore the needs of children and to do nothing to help those in greatest need.

These are fair reforms, which provide real security and real help at a time of real need for bereaved husbands and wives and their children. I commend the proposals to the House.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I must thank the Secretary of State for giving me a copy of his statement in advance. It contains some good and some bad proposals, and I shall deal with those fairly quickly.

Obviously, it is the Government's right and responsibility to reform the benefit. They are right: things have changed. The way in which people live their lives is changing all the time. No benefit is fixed in concrete and should stay the same for ever—that is an agreed principle. Therefore, the Government are right to consider this benefit. There is no question about that.

Clearly, the question is how the Government go about it. Who will be the winners and the losers? What will be the long-term prospects for those who would, or should, be dependent on assistance and support as a result of national insurance contributions made, in many cases, by husbands but now, obviously, by wives?

When we introduced the lump sum concept in the mid-1980s, it was the right thing to do. By increasing it—that is welcome—the Secretary of State has agreed that that is the right principle. It goes to people at the moment when they most need it, and does not depend on their filling out huge forms and getting into difficulties. The right hon. Gentleman was therefore right to focus on that; it is welcome.

Clearly, the issue of men being dependent on the benefit was relevant because of the court case. It was a necessary change. The Government have taken the view that the case will be won, and whether they are being a little previous is not the point of this debate. The fact is that they have taken that view, and there is no point in discussing it further.

However, the Government must answer some other major questions. First, the Secretary of State talked about the average £85. Will he break that figure down? He said that the benefit was currently worth, on average, £85. Does that mean that the future commitment is to retain it at that purchasing power? How will he calculate that in future? Obviously, the £85 is a mix of what is there at the moment, but why not specify how it is broken down and the Government's commitment for the future?

I must criticise the Government on their handling of the second issue, as it concerns me that they have put the cart before the horse. Surely the issue is linked inextricably with pension reform. Everything that the Secretary of State has said puts the burden on those in work to provide not merely for their own retirement, but for their dependants and spouses. He is suggesting that that will, and should, happen; yet we have heard nothing in 18 months from the Government about pension reform, other than leaks and suggestions in the papers that they are eroding the pension. They have said a little about what they may do, but there has been no great focus on the subject. So many of them—*[Interruption.]*

It is all very well for those on the Treasury Bench to snigger. The fact is that many people outside this place who have listened to the statement will be concerned about what means testing means to them and how they can provide security for their families when they have no idea what framework the Government propose for pensions. The Government must accelerate that process; otherwise, people will remain in fear and will worry about what will happen to them.

The second part of the statement was the most critical. This Government seem to be unable to admit that they are about getting rid of the contributory principle. That is what this is all about. They do it by stealth. Each time the Secretary of State produces another proposal, the ending of the contributory principle lies at its heart.

The Secretary of State is being very clever in talking about widows pensions. He says that, after the six-month transitional period, those on income support will continue to receive the benefit for five years. However, those who are not on income support clearly will not receive it. Those on the margins, with small savings, will fall off.

The Secretary of State admits that he has an obligation to those who pay national insurance, but he limits that obligation to five years and to those who are on income support. He is saying that the contributory principle is no longer relevant and will be ended. People outside the House who hear that should remember that the Government are hellbent on completely changing their position.

If the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer intend to means-test the basic state pension after the next election, they should say so. They should say: "The contributory principle is over. We shall now have a means-tested set of benefits." That is what the statement suggests—it proposes taxed and means-tested transitional relief.

The proposals contain an absurdity. The Government will means-test those on upper incomes for this benefit, but the working families tax credit—which the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon.

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), who is chirping away on the Treasury Bench, admitted would create no jobs—will be paid to people with incomes as high as £38,000 year. The Government seem to be unable to settle that conflict. They means-test to reduce some benefits, whereas they scatter money around and waste it on other benefits, increasing expenditure by £1.5 billion.

Reform of the benefit is necessary, but this reform is driven by a Government who are in desperate need of short-term savings. They are scraping away, saying, "We've got to find some way to save the money." The Secretary of State is, in no small measure, robbing Pauline to help Paul.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging the fact that I gave him a copy of the statement, but I had hoped that he would read it. The proposals contain no short-term savings, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has pointed out. As I said in the statement, we are spending more in the short term to meet immediate need. The £500 million savings will be in the long term—like the measures that I announced some three weeks ago, these proposals represent major structural changes to the benefits system, which will enable us to plan for the future.

I am also grateful to the hon. Gentleman for welcoming the fact that the lump sum will be increased, which most people recognise will meet an immediate need. He said that we were right to extend the benefits to men and women, although he thought that we were premature in taking account of the case that is before the European Court. I take a slightly different view: I believe that it is unfair to treat men and women differently, which is why I wanted to put right that wrong.

If the best that the hon. Gentleman can say is that he is against my announcement because it did not deal with pensions, I shall have to accept it. I shall make a separate statement on pensions when the Government publish their proposals, as we have promised. Today's announcement was about widows benefits.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the make-up of the £85 a week. That figure—the widows maintenance allowance—will depend on how many children a widow has. There is an allowance of £9.90 for the first child and £11.30 for the second. There is also a state earnings-related pension scheme element. The hon. Gentleman asks whether we will keep the figure under review. As he should know, all benefit figures are kept under review.

The contributory principle is worthy of discussion, although perhaps not in these exchanges. Successive Governments have changed the conditions attached to the contributory principle. Indeed, the previous Government did so on several occasions—most recently in 1996, when the entitlement to unemployment benefit was reduced from a year to six months. We are in many respects increasing the benefits available—we are extending benefits to men, and we are increasing the lump sum.

Over the past few weeks, the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members have called for welfare reform. However, whenever any reform is suggested, they say: "Welfare reform, yes, but not this." They will not address themselves to the fact that there are many problems with the current benefits system and that not least among them is the problem that we are paying benefits to people who do not need them and not doing enough for people who do. That in itself is a case for reform, and that reform deserves support.

Conservative Members must do a little bit better than merely apologising for cutting the married persons tax allowance—which is their policy on the family—and proposing a transferable tax allowance which would cost £4 billion every year; they cannot tell us how they would fund it.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Is the Secretary of State proposing that the existing package of benefits for widows should be extended to widowers? If so, how many widowers and how many women will lose benefit when the reforms come into force, and how many people will be pushed on to means tests?

Mr. Darling: No, we are not proposing to apply the existing benefits regime to men. That would cost about £250 million a year and could not be justified. We are continuing the system of support for mothers, and now fathers, with young children, which is entirely justified, and ensuring that the allowance payable to people without children runs for six months only. That is a major change from the present scheme. We cannot justify spending money on those who do not need it while many people who need help are not supported.

I know my right hon. Friend's view on income support—he is against means-testing—but income support and means-testing are ways of ensuring that we get the help to those who need it most, and that is an extremely important safeguard as a fundamental part of the structure of the benefit system. Our reforms for widows benefits overall will ensure that we give help where it is needed.

On my right hon. Friend's detailed points, I sent him a copy of the consultation document, and he ought by now to have received it.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I, too, am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving me a chance to read his statement before he delivered it. I have both read it and listened to him delivering it, so I hope that I know what is in it. The Liberal Democrats welcome the doubling of the lump sum but, given the Secretary of State's cogent arguments for it, should it not be done straight away? It will be given universal acclaim and could probably be implemented by regulation rather than by primary legislation. If the costs are already much greater than £1,000, we could surely do something about that immediately.

We also welcome the reform to make all the payments payable to men who lose their wives as well as to wives who lose their husbands. That is clearly right, as I have said to the Secretary of State before, and I am glad that he has acknowledged that in his statement. Is the new bereavement allowance to have an earnings-related element, as I believe the current widows pensions do?

Is not six months far too short a time for the bereavement allowance to run? The Secretary of State will surely know that, when people lose their spouses in middle age, it can take them months to get over it or even to start thinking straight again about their future. His comments about those who will be over 55 in 2001

suggest that such people may take much longer than six months to start making new plans. Would it not be sensible for the bereavement allowance to last some years rather than some months?

Mr. Darling: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman on that point. The period for which an allowance should run is always a matter of judgment. We took the view that six months would be a suitable period to allow someone to adapt to changed circumstances. Almost as many women work as men; the situation is now very different from 50 years ago, when very few women worked after marriage. All the experience shows that women wanting to return to work want to do so rather sooner than after a period of several years.

The hon. Gentleman asked why the lump sum cannot be introduced now. The proposals are part of a package. Following an exchange that one of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues had with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during Prime Minister's Question Time, I must tell the Liberal Democrats that, at some point, they have to square up to the fact that all these things have to be paid for. This is a coherent package of reform.

I am grateful for the general welcome that the hon. Gentleman has given to a number of the specific proposals. The hon. Gentleman asked whether there will be an earnings-related element. I was not quite sure exactly what he was getting at. The widows payment is taxable now. If he is concerned about the state earnings-related pension scheme, he will see that the details are spelled out in the consultation paper. However, SERPS continues for the parents allowance.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): I welcome the Government's search for a modern approach to this important issue on widows, widowers and bereavement. I welcome particularly those parts of the package that do not rely on means-testing. There are some useful ideas about targeting resources without recourse to the means test.

I put it to the Secretary of State that, over the past 20 years, a number of ad hoc policy reforms have touched on the national insurance system, yet, paradoxically, we have never had a serious debate about the future of national insurance and the contributory principle in this country. We have to find a means of holding that serious debate about a national insurance system based on the principle that people contribute to the community chest when they can, and draw out, as of right, when they need to do so. Given the new issues such as how we fund long-term care and perhaps pay for parental leave, surely we need a debate to see whether a renaissance of the social insurance principle could be the future of social security if we are to avoid the increasing move towards the nastiness and division of the means test.

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend knows more than most, the benefits system in this country is complex. The contributory system sits alongside means-tested payments for extra costs and so on. I suspect that most people going along to the Benefits Agency will ask not about the origin of the payment but about how much they will get and the conditions of entitlement. I agree that this matter ought to be debated and I know that a number of hon. Members would like such a debate. By good luck, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is sitting next to me, and she will no doubt be pencilling in a date as we speak. It is a serious debate in which I intend to engage before too long.

The Government approach this as a matter of principle. In general terms, first, we want to ensure that we encourage all those who can work to do so and, secondly, we want to provide security for those who cannot. In each case, particularly where we want to provide greater security, we must ask ourselves how we can best get money to those who need it most. This afternoon's announcement goes a long way to meeting some of the gaps in need that have existed before. I believe that income-related benefits will remain part of the system for some time to come. They are important, particularly for the low-paid. I shall be happy to have a general debate; I am sure that some hon. Members cannot wait, but I suspect that others possibly can.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Can the Secretary of State explain why it is fair to take away widows benefit from widows without dependent children when they have incredibly modest means but not sufficiently modest to be able to qualify for income support while, at the same time—if I understand the Secretary of States's announcement—proposing to give benefit to other widows and widowers who may have been left a substantial amount by their dead spouse?

Mr. Darling: My proposal is that we continue to help the surviving parent and children. What is more, we want to extend that help to men with young children who do not get a penny under the present system. For those without children, the widow and widowers pension should be payable for a transitional period of six months because we believe that that is a reasonable time to adjust. I repeat my earlier point that I find it difficult to justify the current situation where, in many cases, we are paying benefit for years to people who do not need it while not doing nearly enough for others, particularly those with young children. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would support that, rather than defending the status quo, which most people find it difficult to defend.

Audrey Wise (Preston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is absurd for the Tories to complain about means-testing, which is their favourite tool? By the same token, we have to be cautious about making it a tool of ours. I offer my warm congratulations to my right hon. Friend on the extension of the principle of benefits to widowers for the first time, which is a good move. However, I wish to express my concern and ask for more information about the position of older widows. My right hon. Friend referred to the fact that many women now work, but he did not mention that they are still congregated in low-paid, temporary or part-time work or that the gender gap in wages is widening. Will he give more thought to, and explain, the plight in which older widows may be left by his proposals?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her welcome for many of the proposals. Low wages for women generally, and older women in particular, will be helped by the minimum wage. It is more difficult to take account of women aged 55 and older when changing the structure of the system, but we want to ensure that those on income support are no worse off after the changes.

[Mr. Darling]

In other words, we wish to safeguard the position of that older generation of women who are probably less likely to be in work than younger women because of the changes in working habits.

My hon. Friend makes a good point about means-testing. I am not sure whether the Conservatives have now come out against means-testing as part of their strategy, but we will wait and see. Today, we have introduced a disregard of £10 for the poorest widows and widowers to ensure that they get a benefit from the widows and widowers payments that they do not currently get. That is a similar move to ones that we have made for other benefits, and it means that the poorest will keep the benefit of £10 a week. That will be welcome.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): May I seek the Minister's confirmation? In the simplest terms, he appeared to say that the widows pension will be abolished for those under 45, whether men or women, if they are widowed in the future; there will be a more generous payment on bereavement; there will be a payment for six months; and otherwise they will need to rely on income support and other child allowances. That seemed to be the essence of his statement.

The role of men and women in our society may have more overlap than before, and both may work, but there are still significant differences. Because women generally have a lower earning power and many break their careers to have families, a system of benefits for those who are widowed that is precisely equal for men and women is not entirely suitable. Indeed, most women will feel that it is unfair, given the patterns of employment and different responsibilities of men and women.

Mr. Darling: I am becoming increasingly puzzled about the Conservatives' position on these matters. Over the years, patterns have changed and the work force is now almost half made up of women, thanks in many ways to the reforms that we are introducing. The difficulties of low pay are being addressed, and many women have successful careers and have chosen to work throughout their lives. The benefits system must reflect that. The hon. Gentleman should remember that the system was introduced in the 1940s, when most women did not work. When Beveridge drew up the plan, it was never the intention that people should remain on benefit when they could be working.

I believe strongly that the benefits system must change to take account of completely different economic and social circumstances. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's argument; he seems on the one hand to argue for the status quo, but on the other to display a new-found sympathy for the low-paid. I cannot understand such an attitude from the Conservative party, which has spent a lifetime fostering lack of such sympathy.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): My right hon. Friend knows that I represent part of north-east England where working class men die younger than in any other part of England. Is he telling me that, as a result of the changes that he proposes, a woman partner of one of those working men who is left a small quantity of savings or a small works pension that still accrues to them after her husband's working life will be completely excluded from all long-term bereavement benefits unless her savings and income are reduced to the bare income support level? If he is saying that, I urge him to think again.

Mr. Darling: I am not saying that. All bereaved husbands or wives will be entitled to an allowance for the six-month period. Those with children will receive the allowance for a lot longer. Those who are dependent on or entitled to benefits will receive them. My hon. Friend must face the fact that nearly 40 per cent. of women who currently receive the benefit are in the top half of the income bracket. Others are working and earning quite good wages. I am determined to ensure that bereavement benefits bring help to those who most need it. That is what the reforms are designed to do.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Can the Secretary of State say at what level of earnings a widow or a widower who has children will begin to lose benefit under his new proposals?

Mr. Darling: If the hon. Gentleman cares to consult the various income support tables that we publish each year, he will be able to find that level easily.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I welcome the statement, particularly the £10 disregard on income support and the doubling of the lump sum. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, contrary to reports, the new bereavement allowance will not be means-tested? Will he confirm, too, that the generous current contributing conditions for the lump sum will remain the same?

Mr. Darling: The contributory conditions will not be affected, and the benefit will not be means-tested.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Does my right hon. Friend realise that many of us share his puzzlement that the Opposition now oppose means testing, and champion the national insurance principle? Does he recall that, when the previous Government made the change from unemployment benefit to jobseeker's allowance—a major breach of the national insurance principle—they changed the signing-on rules so that those who had previously not worked for 10 years and were aged 50 or over would not have to sign on, but those in that position after 1996 would have to do so? Can he clarify whether those bereaved in later life will be required to sign on?

Mr. Darling: It is the case that, as a result of reforms introduced by the Conservatives, widows had to sign on a week after losing their husbands. As a result of my proposals, at their introduction women aged over 55 will not have to sign on for work, because I do not think it reasonable that they should have to do so.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I refer briefly to a constituency case that touches on the Secretary of State's statement? A woman in my constituency was widowed about four weeks ago. She is in her mid-50s, and her husband was in his late 50s. She receives about £60 a week in bereavement allowance, and she works eight hours a week as a cleaner. She would like to work more to supplement her diminished income, but fears that she cannot do so because her widows allowance will be

reduced for every hour she works or every pound she earns. Is that correct; if it is, does the Secretary of State's statement remedy her situation?

Mr. Darling: If the hon. and learned Gentleman would care to write to me, I will look into that case. If the situation is as he described, it occurs under the system that we inherited. His constituent ought to be receiving £64 a week, which is a taxable benefit, and it is not clear how she is losing the benefit to which he referred, but I will look into the case if he writes to me.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): After the complexities of the transitional period are out of the way, how many more people than at present does the Secretary of State estimate will face means tests?

Mr. Darling: Again, Conservative Members are expressing concerns about the means test, which many Labour Members find extraordinary. Using a variety of measures, such as the new deal and the single gateway, we are ensuring that as many people as possible have the opportunity to work rather than be reliant on benefits. I repeat my earlier point that many women work at present and many more are choosing to work, and we propose to make it easier for them to do so.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Will the Secretary of State clarify whether existing widows will benefit from the proposals? I had a telephone call two weeks ago from a constituent who is on benefits because he had been caring for his wife. She died, and he had a visit from the Benefits Agency for the sole purpose of tearing up her benefit books. He asked me angrily, "How can I pay for the funeral and live with my two kids on £117 a week?" I hope that, following the statement, I can ring him and give him good news. Will the Secretary of State tell me whether I can do so?

Mr. Darling: The proposal is that, from the implementation date of the changes, widowers will be treated in exactly the same way as widows, so that we avoid a situation in future where bereaved women receive the widows allowance and lump sum for themselves and their children, but men do not.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): May I follow on the questions asked by the Secretary of State's colleagues, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and the hon. Members for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins)? The right hon. Gentleman knows that, since the Widows', Orphans' and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act 1925, widows pensions have been based firmly on the contributory principle. Will he therefore confirm that the proposal is a decisive shift away from that principle towards means testing, and tell the House how that will foster a responsible society?

Mr. Darling: That is a bit rich from the Conservative party, which spent almost a quarter of a generation trying to undermine the contributory principle. The benefits remain contributory. The proposals are not a move towards means-testing. The hon. Gentleman ought to be aware that, during the past 50 years, many changes have been made to the widows benefits regime and to the contributory principle. In many cases, we are extending the benefits that in the past were not available to men and increasing the lump sum. We are determined to ensure that those benefits are modernised to meet the needs of today's society. To say that no change is necessary, and ignore injustices, is absolutely crazy.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, particularly because it addresses the changing roles for men and women in our society. Some of the inequalities, such as low pay, that women face today are caused by the fact that there is still an assumption that they are earning pin money to keep the family going. That is not the case. Many women in my constituency are the only breadwinner in their family. I welcome the policy because—I hope that my right hon. Friend will reassure me on this point—it addresses the changing roles of men and women, particularly the parenting role of the father. For too long, child care and domestic and family roles have been seen as women's burdens, and the proposals are part of the means of beginning to challenge that.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right on the latter point, that fathers and mothers should play a greater role in bringing up their children. Perhaps some of us have further to go than others.

On my hon. Friend's general point, the Government's whole strategy on welfare to work and reform of the benefits system is to do everything possible to encourage men and women to work and to make work pay, something that the Conservative party opposes.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I thank the Secretary of State for going one step further than he needed to go. He may have been forced to extend widows benefits to widowers, including those with children, but I thank him for extending them to existing widowers with children. I draw his attention to the case of my constituent, who was widowed earlier this year, has two young children and is struggling to keep a part-time job to pay for child care. If I tell my constituent that he will have to wait two and a half years, he will be desperate. Must the package take two and a half years to be introduced? Could it not be introduced in even one and a half years?

Mr. Darling: The measure is part of a package. It will not be possible to implement the package before April 2001. It is always tempting to implement one part while delaying another, but the measure must be seen as part of a coherent package. Whatever the date is, there are bound to be problems either side of it.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for welcoming the fact that, from the implementation date, we will be able to help fathers with young children, even those without mothers now. The hon. Gentleman must accept that all these changes take time. We need primary legislation, and we need to change our systems to enable us to introduce the package. April 2001 is probably the earliest that we can do that.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify a point that builds on the interesting question from the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks)? Is it his intention to put men and women on the same basis? Will the payment of the new

[Mr. Eric Pickles]

six-month bereavement benefit be determined by the level of contribution of the other spouse? If so, how will the Government deal with the question raised by the hon. Member for Preston (Audrey Wise), as contributions from wives are likely to be less than contributions from husbands? *[Interruption.]* Almost certainly. The hon. Member for Preston has a great deal of experience of these matters and knows what she is talking about. How will the right hon. Gentleman deal with that shortfall? Will there be a mechanism to equate the level of pension that husbands and wives receive?

Mr. Darling: As I said earlier, this is a contributory benefit. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He wants to defend the status quo, and now he is asking for a slight change in the contributory benefits system. Far more women now make contributions than was ever expected 50 years ago.

Personal Statement (Paymaster General)

4.16 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. Geoffrey Robinson): Madam Speaker, I am taking the earliest opportunity available to me to apologise to the House for the late registration of my ownership of Stenbell Ltd., and the directorships of Agie UK between 1984 and 1987 and Transtec plc between 1987 and 1990. I have apologised in writing to the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and have amended my entry in the register to include Roll Center Inc., which I owned between February 1988 and January 1992.

The House will want to be assured that these shareholdings and directorships were matters of public record. No attempt was made by me at any time to use my position in this House to advance any commercial interest. The oversight concerning registration, for which I apologise, is entirely my responsibility.

BILL PRESENTED

FINANCIAL SERVICES (ETHICAL, &C. CONSIDERATIONS)

Mr. Tony Colman presented a Bill to require the Financial Services Authority to issue guidance to persons authorised to provide financial services regarding advice to be given to clients: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 264].

Freedom of Information

4.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to extend the right of access to information held by public authorities; and for connected purposes.

A freedom of information Bill is long overdue and much needed, as the role and complexities of Government are increased, particularly with the growth of the new technologies. The promise of such a Bill is one of the few promises to have endured in Labour manifestos since 1974, and it is yet to be realised. It survives there because, apart from the fact that it is supported by the overwhelming majority of my hon. Friends and many hon. Members throughout the Chamber, the concept has the endorsement of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister stated that in the introduction to the White Paper that was prepared for my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). My right hon. Friend was a principal architect of the White Paper, and many of us would have liked to see him pilot through the legislation and realise that election promise by getting it on to the statute book as a Government Bill. However, I am pleased that he is in his place today. His presence, together with that of other hon. Members, underlines the fact that there is widespread support for a freedom of information Bill across the political spectrum. That support is also reflected by the sponsors of the Bill, which I shall publish today.

We desperately need to change the public service culture on the keeping of records and public access to such records. My Bill would make it a presumption that all records held by public bodies could, and should, be available for public access and scrutiny. The legislation draws upon the experience and the statutes of other jurisdictions, such as the United States, the Netherlands, Sweden, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It defines "records" as any written or printed document, any plan, map, photograph, tape or electronic record.

The Bill does not exclude the security services, the police or the Crown Prosecution Service from its scope. It is right that we should not jeopardise their role in detecting crime and determining who should be prosecuted and the means of prosecution. The defence of the realm should not be put in jeopardy. My Bill would introduce safeguards to guarantee that those important functions were not impeded in any way. However, I believe that it is quite wrong that there should be a blanket exemption for the services to which I have referred.

Many members of the public will welcome the fact that the Bill's provisions would apply to the former publicly owned industries that are now in private hands, which enjoy a monopoly or near-monopoly. I have in mind industries such as water, gas, electricity and so on. The spirit of the Bill is one not of compulsion, but change: we want to change attitudes and encourage the holders of public records to prepare now to make them available. We want to reassure them that any reasonable custodian of such records would have nothing to fear from the fact that the public would have access to them.

Whenever there was disagreement, mediation would be the key. My Bill envisages that every Ministry, public agency, or former public utility that is now in private ownership would designate a senior person to listen to the arguments of those seeking access, and of any agency refusing to grant access by claiming that the disclosure of information would cause substantial harm. We hope that the resolution of such differences would be dealt with in house, but, as a fall-back position, a new information commissioner would be appointed. He would have the status of a judge, and the power to demand access to documents and to reach some conclusion. He would also be able to issue instructions as to what documents could, and should, be made available.

"Reasonableness" is the key word throughout the Bill. That includes reasonableness in the cost of access. We will not tolerate any abuse of the right of access. However, the Bill also ensures that individuals with few resources who were trying to fight the big battalions—perhaps they opposed some motorway scheme or a proposal that adversely affected their businesses—would not be disadvantaged by cost. Charges would be very modest, but there would be safeguards against those who might seek to abuse the system. In addition, the legislation ensures that the disclosure of public records would not place a disproportionate additional burden on the public purse. I re-emphasise that I want a culture whereby our Ministries and agencies prepare documents and records in such a way that they can be made available at minimal cost and with least delay.

Obviously there would be tests for disclosure. The primary test would be the public interest, and exemptions would be justified only where the people resisting the disclosure of information could show that substantial harm would be done to the public interest. I make no apology for reminding the House of recent scandals: the BSE scandal; the Bristol royal infirmary scandal, in which people should have been given information a lot earlier; and the plight of, and distress experienced by, many people in respect of Gulf war syndrome—in all those cases, there was a failure to grant access to information, and to recognise that there were problems.

The history of all those shameful parts of our recent history would have been different had such a measure been on the statute book. Most related to the previous Administration. However, I am disappointed that, when I asked my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a parliamentary question about the dates on which the Cabinet has met since the general election, I was not able to have that information. That underlines how we must change the culture of government and of people who advise Ministers. Why on earth cannot such information be made available?

I draw strength and support from the Prime Minister himself. Addressing the Campaign for Freedom of Information, he said:

> "It is not some isolated constitutional reform that we are proposing with a Freedom of Information Act. It is a change that is absolutely fundamental to how we see politics developing in this country over the next few years."

I acknowledge the bottleneck for legislative time, but I say to my right hon. Friends that placing such a Bill on the statute book could be a great benchmark for the radicalism of the Government and, indeed, this Parliament, in which we are all privileged to serve. The Bill would become an enduring Act, which would create

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

new rights and enhance our democracy. I therefore hope that I have the overwhelming support of the House to introduce the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Dr. David Clark, Mr. Mark Fisher, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Rhodri Morgan, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Ms Roseanna Cunningham, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Martin Bell, Dr. Tony Wright and Mr. Ronnie Campbell.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay accordingly presented a Bill to extend the right of access to information held by public authorities; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Thursday 19 November, and to be printed [Bill 265].

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Messages from the Lords shall have been received.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

Lords Reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed and for disagreeing to the further Commons amendment to the Bill in lieu, considered.

Lords Reason:

The Lords insist on their Amendments in page 2, lines 1, 2, 15 and 18 to which the Commons have disagreed and disagree with the Commons in their Amendment in lieu thereof, for the following Reason:

Because the review proposed by the Commons is not an adequate substitute for an electoral system that allows electors to vote for the individual party candidate of their choice.

4.28 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their Amendments but does not insist on its Amendment in lieu.

I understand that, with this, it will be convenient to discuss the further Government amendment to the Bill in lieu of the Lords amendments, in page 3, line 46, at end insert—

'Review of electoral system

.—(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint one or more persons—

(a) to review, in accordance with subsection (2), the operation of the system of election provided for by section 3 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 as substituted by section 1 of this Act, and

(b) to make a report to the Secretary of State within six months from the day of appointment.

(2) The review shall consider, in particular, how the ability of electors to vote for particular persons on a party's list of candidates might affect the results of an election.

(3) The Secretary of State shall carry out his duty under subsection (1) within one month from the date of the first general election to the European Parliament which takes place after the coming into force of section 1.

(4) The Secretary of State shall lay a copy of any report received under subsection (1)(b) before each House of Parliament.'.

For the second time this week, I find myself at the Dispatch Box, which is always a pleasure, seeking this House's agreement to overturn a vote in the other place on the Bill. I am here because a group of people—whose only claim to sit in the legislature is some action of their forebears—believes that it has the right to impose its will on this democratically elected House.

Since we last discussed the Bill less than 48 hours ago, we have amended the review clause to give statutory effect to my promise last time to consult the Opposition parties about who should undertake the post-election review. That is now, or will be, if the House and the other place agree, in the Bill. In addition, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear at Prime Minister's Question Time, there could also be a role for the independent electoral commission that was proposed by Lord Neill and his colleagues, which has been welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and on which we hope to legislate as soon as possible.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): We are pleased to hear that the review has been strengthened, and hope that Conservative Members who have said that they

enjoy the Neill approach to electoral commissions will be satisfied with that; but I wonder whether the Home Secretary is aware that the Conservative spokesman, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, called for precisely such a review in Committee. I wonder whether the Home Secretary feels that the amendment is now satisfactory in terms of what he knows about what the Conservative peers wanted in June.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but it was not only in the other place that Conservatives were calling for a review. It is difficult to follow the contortions of the Conservative party on the issue over the past two years. On Monday, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) said:

"We cannot accept the latest review put forward by the Government."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 716.]

He added that it was "ludicrous", and criticised us for the fact that we were proposing that the review should cover the merits of the open list as well as the closed list. His comments were more revealing than he thought. They showed how this decrepit Opposition have lurched from one wheeze to another, and are now impaled on the ludicrous and indefensible proposition that hereditary Conservative peers should block the will of this elected House.

Among his other problems, the hon. Member for Hertsmere is suffering from a bout of serious amnesia.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way after I have dealt with the hon. Member for Hertsmere.

Here is a man who now says that a review, post the elections next June, is "ludicrous", yet, on 12 March in the House, the same man moved new clause 4 to the Bill. What did that propose? That said that the Secretary of State should establish an independent review of the advantages and disadvantages of the electoral system under the Bill—the closed list system—compared with the open list and first-past-the-post systems, and to do so no sooner than 12 months after the June elections.

That is the same thing as we put before the House on Monday, with one difference: we propose to carry that out within six months; the hon. Member for Hertsmere did not want it to happen until 12 months had elapsed. If he has some explanation of why he has changed his mind, I should be happy to give way to him.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Certainly. As the Home Secretary will know, we opposed the closed list from the outset, but, on the review, the Home Secretary's own memory is playing a few tricks on him. He will remember that, on Second Reading, he promised to listen to and to look at both sides of the arguments. Since then, he has received no representations in favour of the closed list, but has come down in favour of it. How can we have any confidence in him and his reviews when we have had an experience such as that?

Mr. Straw: If I had been in the hon. Gentleman's position, I would not have made that intervention, because it explained nothing. Of course I have been willing to listen. No one can accuse me of not having listened to the debate. I have sat here for almost every minute of the hours and hours that we have devoted to the issue.

Indeed, I can fairly claim—I think I will have the generous approbation of Opposition Members on this—that, if I have done nothing else during the 35 hours, now, of debate, which is almost a world record, I have made Mr. Victor d'Hondt famous, and greatly contributed to the forthcoming annual Christmas quiz: name 10 famous Belgians. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who are the others?"] Well, four hereditary Tory peers have Belgian origins.

Mr. Lansley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I am going to give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, but let me deal with the hon. Member for Hertsmere.

We had the Second Reading of the Bill on 25 November. I did say that I would listen to the arguments, and I did listen to them. As my record on the Human Rights Bill shows, I believe in listening carefully to the arguments, and, where possible, accepting them, from whatever part of House they come. We were not able to accept the arguments in favour of the open list, for reasons on which—whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not—I shall expand in a moment; nor were we able to accept the arguments in favour of the Belgian system.

The hon. Gentleman knew all that by 12 March. On 12 March, he tabled new clause 4, which called for a review, not before we introduced the closed list, but after. On Monday, he turned on his head and said that he was not in favour of a review after all.

Mr. Lansley: I recall the same joke about the Belgians being made in the course of those many hours. We are even hearing the same jokes all over again.

Can the Home Secretary recall how many of his Back Benchers, in all those hours, spoke in favour of the closed-list system for next year's elections, and how many spoke in favour of an open list? In fact, all his hon. Friends are opposed to a closed list and in favour of an open list.

Mr. Straw: As ever, the Conservative Opposition spoil their case with exaggeration and invention. It is not true that every Labour Member has spoken with a difference of emphasis—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will. The numbers are clear from *Hansard*, and include my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) in the original debate on 25 November. The proposition was absolutely clear on that day. My hon. Friends the Members for Battersea (Mr. Linton) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) said the same two days ago. Such is the power of the argument we have advanced that we have been massively supported in the Lobbies not only of the House of Commons, but of the other place. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We must be able to hear the Minister.

Mr. Straw: The Conservative party must face up to what happens once someone is removed from the list.

[Mr. Straw]

The fact that 131 hereditary peers voted in favour of the change to closed lists provides the clearest possible mandate.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Is the Home Secretary seriously suggesting that the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) was in favour of the closed list?

Mr. Straw: Yes. I listened to his speech with great interest, and, if he was not in favour of the closed list, he could have voted in the No Lobby.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I will in a moment. I have some more illuminating remarks to make to Conservative Members first.

Beyond the issue of a review, little has changed since Monday, except that the British people now see more clearly than ever why they were so wise to approve another categorical Labour manifesto commitment—the commitment to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. The more the public see of them, the stronger they make the case for abolition.

On the one o'clock news on the BBC, we witnessed the risible spectacle of the fourth Baron Ampthill—a Cross Bencher, as it happens—claiming to speak for the British people and British democracy. He, of course, voted with the Conservatives, as nearly all Cross Benchers do. *[Interruption.]* Thirty Cross Benchers voted on the Tory side—because most of them are Tories—and six voted against.

It was a stunningly difficult case for the fourth Baron Ampthill to make, and it was made no easier by the fact that his main claim to fame is that for four years he was general manager of the co-operative stores to the upper classes, Fortnum and Mason. His great-great-grandfather received the peerage, in 1881, for being no more than British ambassador to the German empire. I ask the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), or any other Conservative Member, in the 117 years since creation of that barony, what right has Lord Ampthill or any other hereditary peer had to sabotage the decisions of this elected House?

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way. While he is being gratuitously offensive to a Member of the other place—first because he earned his living working for a perfectly reputable company; and secondly because an ancestor gave distinguished public service—will he remember that the claim to fame of his noble Friend who has been appointed to lead another place is simply that she is the daughter of a former Labour Prime Minister and was married to a former ambassador?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the Home Secretary—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will calm down while I am speaking. First, his intervention was too long. Secondly—I tell those on both sides of the House—let us not get into the personalities of the other place.

Mr. Straw: We now have a statement from the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, who speaks for the moderates among Tory Members—God protect us from the rest of them. He is a serious Conservative Member. It is therefore interesting that he is claiming that hereditary peers have the same status—the same right to sit and to vote in the other place—as those who are appointed on their own merits. I note that, and file it.

I was casting no aspersions on Lord Ampthill, except to say that I find it risible that he was claiming to speak on behalf of the people of the United Kingdom. It is important to examine the background not of individuals who are currently in the other place but of those who were "elected" there initially. The 26th Baron of Mowbray, Segrave and Stourton—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House will have heard what you said about not dealing with personalities. If that applies to Conservative Members, may we assume that it applies also to Labour Members and to the Home Secretary?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members on both sides of the House will have heard what I said. May I tell the Home Secretary that it does not help to talk about the personalities of individual office holders. We should be temperate in our language. I also tell hon. Members that I want to hear the Home Secretary. He is a very nice Home Secretary, and I want to hear him, but I have not been able to.

Mr. Straw: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I note that I had only to read out the name—the fact that he is the 26th Baron. That is all I said about him.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: They rise to the point. I shall give way to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). I should like to know whether he is making the same point as the hon. Member for Surrey Heath—that hereditary peers have the same right as life peers to sit in the other place, and that those who are appointed on the merit of some long-dead forebear have the same right in the other place as those who are appointed on their own merit. Is that the point?

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to the Home Secretary. I shall not talk about personalities, but simply ask whether the Home Secretary believes that one criterion for being Lord Chancellor, for example, might be having been the Prime Minister's pupil master, or that one criterion for being appointed Solicitor-General might be having shared a flat with the Prime Minister?

Mr. Straw: There is a serious point to make, which is that people on both sides in the other place who are

appointed as life peers are appointed on their own merit. Although the hon. Gentleman may disagree about who is appointed—as we sometimes disagreed about appointments by Conservative Prime Ministers—there is a profound difference between those who are appointed on their own merit, however much that may be challenged, and those who are there simply because of the actions or claims of their long-dead forebears.

As I reminded the House on Monday, the great Tom Paine, whom the Tory party at the end of the 18th century was trying to have locked up, and who had to go off to America, said, in a phrase that is as right today as it was then:

"The idea of hereditary legislators is as inconsistent as that of hereditary judges, as hereditary juries; and as absurd as an hereditary mathematician, or an hereditary wise man; as absurd as an hereditary Poet Laureate."

Mr. William Cash (Stone) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I have given way a lot. I just want to make a couple more points.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Well, if the hon. Gentleman wants to ask me about Tom Paine, I shall give way.

Mr. Cash: The Home Secretary is making an analogy with the 18th century. Does he not think that the new system that the Government are devising for replacing the hereditary peers is going back to the 18th century? Instead of rotten boroughs, he will be creating rotten peers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not debating the replacement or removal of peers. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am stating to everyone in the House that that is not what we are debating, and everyone on both sides will have to listen.

4.45 pm

Mr. Straw: We are not replicating a system that existed in the 18th century, for one incontrovertible reason, which will be acknowledged by hon. Members on both sides: Mr. Victor d'Hondt was not born until the 19th century, and without him none of this would have been possible.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) *rose—*

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the two hon. Gentlemen, then I shall get on.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I should like to bring the Home Secretary back from the 18th century to 1998, and back from personalities to the constitution, which he, as Home Secretary, is partly responsible for protecting. We rightly hear a great deal from him about the need to protect the rule of law in this country. Whatever may happen to the House of Lords in the next Session of Parliament, for the moment the law of the land says that hereditary peers have the same voting rights in the upper House as life peers. It is not open to the Home Secretary to change the constitution by diktat.

Mr. Straw: It is certainly not open to me to change the constitution by diktat, and I should not have the impertinence to try to do so. The creator of modern so-called Villa Conservatism—Lord Salisbury—devised the Salisbury doctrine in the late 1880s, recognising the right of an elected House of Commons to meet its manifesto commitments. We have an unwritten constitution, so there is nothing in tablets of stone and no formal basic law that describes the powers of the other place or this House. We are dealing with carefully crafted conventions.

One of the most important conventions, which has kept a balance between this House and the other place, is that established by a distinguished former Conservative Prime Minister and party leader. Those on the Conservative Front Bench, and the other place, are seeking to destroy that convention.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that this is a point of order.

Mr. Cash: It is indeed a point of order. It is about the application of conventions in this House. The Home Secretary has just alleged that there was a Labour manifesto commitment on this issue. That is not the case—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman catches my eye, he may be able to rebut the Home Secretary's argument, but it is not for me to worry about what the Home Secretary says.

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), and then I shall get on.

Mr. Brady: I apologise if I spoil the Home Secretary's fun by returning the debate to its theme. Instead of discussing the House of Lords, perhaps he could consider the difference between the democratic legitimacy of someone elected as a candidate standing in an open election and that of someone who is elected simply because the leader of his party put him at the top of a list.

Mr. Straw: I shall come to that.

We would not be holding these debates were it not for the fact that the other place has sent the issue back to us for the fourth time. Our manifesto commitment was clear—to introduce a proportional system of representation for the European Parliament. As with any party's manifesto, we did not set out every last detail, on that or anything else. That is a verity for all parties.

The closed-list system is used by more voters than any other system in Europe. Moreover, as I shall remind Conservative Members at greater length in a moment, it is a system that their own party used in the 12 months before the general election. They might therefore have spotted that it was the system most likely to be used.

[Mr. Straw]

I know of no Conservative candidate—I shall be happy to give way if there is one—who, whether he or she won or lost a seat at the general election, raised the issue of what kind of list system we should use for the European elections. Everybody understood what we intended to do.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall not give way; I have already given way many times.

The other place asked us to think again, yet it has offered us no new arguments to support that request. I have studied carefully what was said there. Yesterday's debate was notable for an excellent speech by the former Labour Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, who made the important point that no electoral system is perfect, but that the open-list system contains within it, as I have shown, the possibility—indeed, the likelihood—of perverse results. My noble Friend also exposed the Conservative party's tactics for what they are—nothing to do with principle, and everything to do with opportunism.

Another notable aspect of the debate in the other place was what was not said. No new arguments in support of open lists were advanced, and no attempt was made to justify the perverse results that they can produce, or to say how those would be explained to a bemused electorate.

I shall spell the problem out, because I do not believe that Conservative Members properly understand what would happen. In the other place, the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, said that he accepted that, under the open-list system, someone might be elected despite having received fewer votes than someone else on another party list. I take that admission as an important sign that, at long last, the penny has dropped a little with at least some of the supporters of the fundamentally flawed so-called open system.

The noble Lord then spoiled his argument by saying that such an outcome, whereby someone could lose but win, and someone else could win but lose, happens all the time under first past the post—when, he added, one compares one constituency with another.

It is an obvious truth that that may happen when we compare one constituency with another. I cannot quite remember how many votes I got at the general election, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there were so many, but it was a lot. Other people may have got more votes and lost—but that would have been in another constituency. Nobody in the House was elected having received fewer votes than somebody else in the same constituency. Yet that is the proposition being supported—

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I want the hon. Gentleman to listen, if he does not mind. If he pays attention, I may consider giving way to him later.

Conservative Members have not yet properly understood the point that I have just made. We are talking not about a comparison between votes cast in different electoral areas, but about votes cast in the same electoral area.

For example, one of the candidates for one of the parties—let us assume that that person is the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)—may be so well known, in the west midlands, say, that he has got near the top of the list, or even right at the top. Everybody wants to vote for him, and few people want to vote for anyone else in the multi-member constituency. The right hon. Gentleman will get most of the votes, and the other Conservative candidates will get very few. In the other parties, the votes are more evenly distributed, and all the other candidates in the other parties get more votes than the second, third, fourth and fifth Conservative candidates. This point can be reversed.

Under the so-called open, or personal system—and because of the high vote that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield got—the result would be that people who received more votes than the second, third and fourth Conservative candidates would not get elected, and the people who got fewer votes than them would get elected. I suggest to Opposition Members that that would be an extraordinary and perverse result. What I have said is accurate, and has been acknowledged by Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish. All he could say is that that happens under first past the post—when it does not.

Mr. Brazier: In trying to make his case that one system of PR is even worse than another, could I ask the Home Secretary to recall in a few months the remark that he made a moment ago—that the great merit of the existing system is that you cannot be defeated by a candidate who gets fewer votes than you, which, of course, would disappear if alternative voting were introduced, as Lord Jenkins has recommended?

Mr. Straw: It might disappear because of some other things that Lord Jenkins may propose, but not because of the alternative vote. Under that system in single-member constituencies, the only person who can conceivably be elected is the person who receives the most votes. *[Interruption.]* I know we are talking about second or third preferences, but it is still the person who pops up at the top. Of course I understand that. It is no good the Conservatives getting angry about it. I am not arguing for the alternative vote system, but, under the system advocated by the Conservatives, there would be the most extraordinary results from the so-called open list, which is scarcely an open list at all.

If there were five vacancies under a true open list in a multi-member constituency, the voters would be given five votes. They might be given five votes as crosses to allocate equally, or five votes to allocate in order of preference. Under the Conservative system—which, I suggest, is only dimly understood by Conservative Members—voters in the five-member constituency would be given not five votes, but one vote, so that they could vote for only one candidate of their choice. Having voted for one candidate of their choice, they would trigger the operation of a list.

We are, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has spelt out, trying to save the Conservative party from itself in this endeavour. The Conservative party is saying that people will have a choice, but they will have nothing of the kind—except the oddest kind of choice, in which five vacancies have to share one single vote.

In contrast to the extraordinarily complicated system that the Conservatives are proposing, with the serious and perverse result that the winners lose and the losers win—

a system which can best be described as last past the post—there is the closed-list system. The great merit of the closed-list system is that the voters know exactly what they will get. They vote for the list as a whole, and they choose which team they wish to support.

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): Speaking as the only Cross Bencher in this place—although I am not allowed to speak from the Cross Benches—can I wonder whether the British, as a free people, should not be voting for individuals rather than a party slate?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is the exception in this House that proves the rule. He stood as an independent candidate without a party.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Labour party backed him. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend also makes my point, and I am deeply grateful to him—as ever. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) may have had Labour party backing, but he stood as an independent. The people of Tatton had a choice between a Conservative candidate, who happened to be named Hamilton, and an independent candidate—the hon. Gentleman.

All the rest of us, who carry party labels, came here as party candidates on closed lists of one. *[Interruption.]* It is no good Conservative Members complaining about that, because it is the truth, for the following reason.

It is easy to devise a system in which voters have a choice of party, but are also given a choice of candidate for that party—some systems of that sort exist in the United States. The ballot paper would offer a choice of, for example, the Labour, the Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties, which would determine which party won, but it would also offer a choice of, say, three Liberal Democrat, Conservative or Labour candidates. Therefore, the primary takes place on the same day.

No party in the Westminster Parliament operates that system. Each selects its own candidate and presents the electorate with a single, closed list: one party, one candidate. So the principle that we are dealing with for the European elections is the same principle under which everyone in the House, bar the hon. Member for Tatton, has been elected.

5 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Straw: No. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have already given way a great deal.

Nor was any attempt made in the other place to answer the point made by the Conservative Lord Bethell—no friend of this Government—that Members and aspiring Members of the European Parliament would be known only to a tiny minority of the electorate, and that choices made between them would inevitably involve much randomness. I remind the House that the noble Lord said in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, which was published on Monday:

"I wonder, though, if the Conservatives want the elections to be fought on the fully 'open list' system. If so"—

this is a warning that Conservative Members would do well to note—

"they will run into problems. The open list offers a choice so wide as to be confusing, especially since hardly any of the several hundred candidates whose names will be put forward have any public profile. Ballot papers will carry 50 or more names. Hardly anyone will know of them. Voters will mark their crosses at random."

The arguments for the closed list are simple and persuasive. It is an easy system to use, it removes the need for randomness, and for possibly discriminatory choices, and it does not have the potential for anomalous results. It is used in five other major European countries: Germany, Greece, France, Spain and Portugal, whose people are just as committed to the principles of democracy as we are.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): What has that to do with us?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) asks what Europe has to do with us—

Mr. Alan Johnson (Hull, West and Hessle): It has very little to do with her.

Mr. Straw: Well, I understand her xenophobia, even though I do not share it.

I have never supported the proposition that, just because something happens in Europe, we should follow it, and I do not think that anyone supports it. However, the people of Germany, Greece, France, Spain and Portugal are just as committed to the principle of democracy as we are. They have been ready to accept the system. It has worked, and there have been no complaints about its fairness there.

I would also point out, in particular to the hon. Lady, but also to her hon. Friends, that she may have forgotten—those on the Conservative Front Bench have plainly forgotten it, but we have not—that the closed-list system was exactly the system that the Conservative Government used two years ago. *[Interruption.]* It is no good groaning about it. I know that Conservative Members do not want to be reminded of any of their history, but the closed-list system—

Mrs. Gorman: The right hon. Gentleman is being insulting.

Mr. Straw: I am not insulting the hon. Lady, but I will be happy to give way to her.

Mrs. Gorman: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Notwithstanding the fact that the right hon. Gentleman is substituting rhetoric for argument, I have stated in this House, and will do so again, that I do not particularly admire European systems. On examination, one realises that, over the centuries, they have produced unstable Governments or dictatorships, whereas our system of first past the post has guaranteed a democratic system under which this Government have flourished.

Mr. Straw: Those countries use modern systems, which have not produced what the hon. Lady suggests.

The Conservative Government introduced the closed-list system only two years ago. The system that the Tories now say raises a fundamental principle of

[Mr. Straw]

democracy is the very one that the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), described as "fair and balanced"; he said that it would produce "a representative outcome".

As became obvious to all who heard the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield on Monday, there was really no way out of that box. All he could come up with was that the former Prime Minister had decided to use the system because of the "special circumstances" of Northern Ireland. The principal special circumstance was the creation of a path to democratic government in the Province.

Are we seriously being asked to believe that the former Prime Minister chose the closed list notwithstanding the fact that he believed at the time that it was an anti-democratic system? Of course he did not. He chose it because, as he said, it was fair, balanced, and representative; he also chose it for all its other merits of simplicity, which the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) spelled out at the time.

Over and above the arguments for the change, a simple, stark fact stands out. On each of the four occasions when the Government were defeated in another place, the outcome of the vote would have been different without the votes of the hereditary peers. Last night, the Labour Government achieved one of their highest votes ever for any of their legislation. A clear majority of those—from all parties and none—who were appointed to the other place on their own merit, voted for the closed list. Only the votes of the hereditaries—including 103 Conservative hereditaries—who are in the other place not on account of their own merit, but through the chance of their birth, defeated the Government's proposal.

The end of the Session is almost upon us. The Government remain committed to the electoral system in the Bill. If the other place persists in its stance, it must do so in the knowledge that it will cause the Bill to fall in this Session. The Government will have failed to achieve one of their manifesto commitments because of the obstruction of another place—a clear breach of the doctrine established by Lord Salisbury, the great-grandfather of the current Leader of the Opposition in another place.

Both on the merits of the issue, and on the constitutional principle, the House of Commons is right. I ask it to send the clearest possible message to the other place.

Sir Norman Fowler: The Home Secretary has spoken on this matter four times, but his case is becoming significantly weaker and more threadbare. He has again set out the range of arguments that he used first time round. He keeps quoting Lord Bethell, but Lord Bethell said in the debate in the House of Lords last night:

> "I know that we cannot have a closed list, which is abominable. My noble Friend on the Front Bench is quite right."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 1139.]

The Home Secretary cites as support among Conservative peers someone who regards the closed list as abominable.

The Home Secretary is wrong in all his arguments. Moreover, many people will object to the arguments that he directed against named hereditary peers; those arguments will do neither his cause nor his reputation any credit, especially as—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) should listen. One of the noble Lords who has consistently voted for the Government is Lord Warner, who was sent to the House of Lords for no reason other than the fact that he was the Home Secretary's special adviser. We shall not take lectures from the Home Secretary on this issue. As for Cross Benchers—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Whip must be quiet.

Sir Norman Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Home Secretary ignores the argument about Cross Benchers and says that they normally vote with the Conservative party. Historically, that is rubbish. In the previous Parliament they voted almost consistently against the Conservative party. Cross Benchers' votes show that anyone who considers the issue from an independent point of view comes out against the Government's proposition.

The Prime Minister calls the position that we are in an affront to democracy. The true affront to democracy is to have a closed list, which denies the public the right to choose a candidate; to put power in the hands, not of the electorate, but of the party bosses; and to force this measure through in spite of all the arguments made, not only by Conservative Members and the House of Lords but, time and time again, by Labour Members.

The Home Secretary says that we have a constitutional problem, but he has no one but himself to blame for the mess that the Government are in. He has ignored all advice and pushed ahead with the closed list. If there is a constitutional problem, he is its author. His handling of the Bill has been an example of blundering incompetence, and all his arguments have been discredited.

The Home Secretary has made it clear that if the debate is lost we will go back to first past the post. I have made it clear that I would prefer that; but that is not the issue. The issue is the form of electoral system that we have under proportional representation. I am tempted to ask the Home Secretary whether his announcement that we will go back to first past the post is a threat or a promise. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Ronnie Campbell, please be quiet.

Mr. Cash: I have found it difficult—in fact, impossible—to vote with my party on this question, because I am so much against the principle of proportional representation, but I congratulate the Opposition on the fact that it looks as though we will go back to first past the post; and thank God for that.

Sir Norman Fowler: I knew that the time would come when my hon. Friend and I would march arm in arm together.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The right hon. Gentleman will know that there are no Conservative Members of the European Parliament from Scotland under first past the post. Has he consulted the Conservative candidates who have been chosen to go on the list for Scotland about the implications for their prospects of what he is doing?

Sir Norman Fowler: If the hon. Gentleman takes any interest in such matters, he will know that we are

committed to first past the post. I do not think that he attended any of the other debates on this subject, so he will not have noticed, but I have clearly set out that policy on every occasion.

The Home Secretary says that he is trying to deliver a manifesto pledge. The closed list was not a manifesto pledge. It could not be, because on Second Reading the right hon. Gentleman himself set up a review of a system—the Belgian system or semi-open list—that went wider than the closed list. If everyone knew that we would get a closed list in any event, his review was a complete sham, so why did we waste our time?

The Home Secretary's argument is that everyone in the country secretly knew that the Labour party was pledged to a closed list. That will take a great deal of swallowing. Are we really to believe that Labour went to the polls in 1997 telling the public, "You can have a closed-list system or a semi-open system, but not an open-list system"? That is an absurd proposition.

That proposition was knocked down most conclusively by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who said:

"Is there a mandate for the Bill? No one came up to me during the general election campaign to say, 'Tony, we will vote Labour only if you promise that we cannot vote for an individual candidate in the European elections.' No one said any such thing, and I did not know that that was the policy."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 685.]

The Home Secretary does not appear to have been very successful in explaining the position to the public, let alone convincing his own side.

The closed list was not a manifesto commitment, so let us forget that nonsense. No more credence should be given to the Home Secretary's argument that the use of the system in 1996 for the Northern Ireland deliberative forum creates a precedent for the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) made it clear at the time that the system was not ideal and was intended to meet the special circumstances of Northern Ireland, and that was the view of the then Leader of the Opposition, who is now the Prime Minister.

Above all, the Home Secretary knows that there are and have been special circumstances in Northern Ireland. I assume that he does not propose to set free terrorists and criminals here in the same way that the Government are doing there. There are fundamental differences. Let us have no more of this nonsense.

5.15 pm

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman keeps failing to answer a fundamental point. His argument is not based on the merits of whether we had a closed-list or another system in Northern Ireland. He is saying that the closed-list system is anti-democratic: in other words, that it is absolutely beyond the pale for all purposes. Given that strong assertion, why did he support the use of that anti-democratic closed-list system for Northern Ireland?

Sir Norman Fowler: The system is anti-democratic in the way in which it will be used in the European elections. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon said:

"I agree with his view that the electoral solution is not ideal."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 500.]

The word "his" refers to the view of the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister.

Mr. Straw: Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the use of the closed-list system in Northern Ireland was anti-democratic?

Sir Norman Fowler: It met the special circumstances of Northern Ireland. That is exactly what we have been saying. It is also exactly what the Prime Minister and the previous Prime Minister said.

By far the most significant feature of all our debates on the issue has been the almost total reluctance of Labour Members to speak out in favour of the closed list. As was demonstrated again last Monday, some of the most bitter criticism of the closed-list system comes from the Benches behind the Home Secretary.

On Monday, the Home Secretary claimed "overwhelming support" for the closed list, or what he then began to call the "simple list" system. The Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who is rather franker on these issues, said:

"It is customary to begin by saying that we have had a good debate. On this occasion, perhaps I will be forgiven for saying that it has been an interesting debate."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 717.]

By that, he meant that of six Labour Members who spoke and listened in the debate, four abstained from voting. Two thirds of those who spoke could not bring themselves to support the Government in the Lobby, while the two who voted with the Government said that they preferred the open list. They held their noses and voted with the Government.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fear that grips the Home Secretary is that, if the open list is adopted, people in Manchester, Yorkshire, Birmingham or London who traditionally vote Labour may be tempted to vote for the old-fashioned socialists who have been shuffled off down to the bottom of the list and to reject the new Labour luvvies who have been put at the top of the list by Mandelson towers?

Sir Norman Fowler: My hon. Friend makes a very good point.

Let me remind the House of some of the contributions from Labour Members. They are entirely relevant to what is now being seen as a clash between the Commons and the Lords. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield, who is not exactly a stranger to the debate on the House of Lords and its functions—*[Interruption.]* If the Minister for Local Government and Housing, the hon. Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) wishes to intervene, I will be happy to allow her to do so. She was not much good in her previous Department, I cannot believe that she is much good—*[Interruption.]*

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield said:

"the arguments against the closed-list system are absolutely overwhelming. Indeed, those arguments are the same"—*[Interruption.]*

[Sir Norman Fowler]

The Home Secretary should listen to this. The Minister for Local Government and Housing will not offer any advice. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"Indeed, those arguments are the same as those arguments against the House of Lords itself for its Members all got in on the closed list. The Prime Minister draws up a little closed list, and puts all its Members into the House of Lords. If we get rid of the hereditary peers, which I would welcome, we shall have nothing but a closed list in the Lords. They will all be the Prime Minister's friends. My objection to the Bill is, therefore, the same as my objection to the House of Lords."

I do not think that even the Home Secretary would regard that as a wholehearted endorsement of his policy. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield does not like hereditary peers, but he seems to like even less the policy of appointees and placemen, which seems to make up Labour's vision of the future—the House of Lords as a giant quango.

In the same debate, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said:

"It has been suggested that I should regard this as a battle between Lords and Commons, and that I could do myself a bit of good by voting with the Government this time. *[Laughter.]* Labour Whips do give us helpful advice: that is what they are there for. As Opposition Members are laughing, I want to make it clear that the Labour party is not a party of control freaks—I am authorised to say that . . . I shall leave the Chamber for a little while to commune with destiny . . . I intend to contemplate my vote, eat my sausage and mash, and hope that someone comes down to see me."

I do not know whether anyone went down to see him, but he did not vote for the Government.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said:

"I feel very strongly about this matter . . . I saw the effect of list systems on the European Parliament and the control that all political parties exercised. I explained time and again—wrongly it now appears—that we would find it difficult to accept that system in Britain, because we had a genuine commitment to a constituency link and we believed that the individual was tremendously important in our system of government. I believe that very strongly."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 684-705.]

The hon. Lady also abstained.

Let no one think that the debate on Monday was in any way exceptional. The advantage of having so many debates on the same issue is that it has been possible to see the trend in the argument. The cast of Labour Back Benchers may change, but the arguments against the closed list are basically the same. In the debate on 27 October, the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said, quite bluntly:

"I am not in favour of the closed-list system. I did not vote for it on Second Reading and I do not intend to vote for it tonight."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1998; Vol. 318, c. 196.]

On 10 November, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) was equally blunt when he said:

"the closed-list system allows fixers to get their way, which is the real reason why I oppose it."

Those are some of the Labour Members who have spoken against the measure. Labour Member after Labour Member has opposed the system. They have opposed the transfer of power to the party organisation, and I suspect that, for every one who has spoken, there are dozens of others who echo those feelings.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a further deficit in the closed-list system is that in no circumstances can there ever be a by-election?

Sir Norman Fowler: That is true. It is just another of the issues involved.

We then get to the desperate defence from the Home Secretary. He recognises that the balance of the argument in this debate has been against him. He would have to be blind and deaf not to recognise that. He says, "Labour Members voted for us, you know." We must ask why so many Labour Members voted for a system in which they do not believe. The answer was given by the hon. Member for Wrexham in the debate on 10 November. He said:

"My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) argued, with good grounds, that there was no majority in favour of the closed-list system in the parliamentary Labour party. Yet, he also argued that the Government would have a large majority tonight. I ask the House to think about that contradiction. If there is no majority in the Labour party but the system is such that the Whips and the Patronage Secretary can dragoon Members through the Lobby—and I admit that I will be dragooned when the time comes—what legitimacy does the elected Chamber have in comparison with the unelected Chamber whose Members may, by and large, vote according to their own judgment on the right course of action for the country?"—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 226-29.]

That is a good question. Surely it is the question that we should be asking. This is a voting system that is wanted by next to nobody and it is being forced through against the opinion of both Labour and Conservative Members and against the vote in the House of Lords. The real issue is not whether the House of Lords is carrying out its right and proper function, but that Labour Whips are forcing support for a voting system which, if the Labour party was left to its own devices, it would reject.

In the House of Lords, the Labour party had substantial difficulty finding speakers to support its measures. Lord Shore, not exactly a Conservative hereditary peer, has to his great credit, spoken and voted consistently against the measure, as has Lord Stoddart. As I pointed out in the previous debate, even those who spoke in favour of the Government were careful not to argue for the closed list, although yesterday one of their Lordships did begin by arguing in that way, and then gave the game away when he said that he hoped that the court would be gentle with him. He had picked up a brief and momentarily forgotten where he was.

The real irony is that the only party which appears to have had anything approaching enthusiasm for this case is the Liberal Democrat party. Its official position is in favour of the open list so, naturally, it voted in favour of a closed list. The credibility of Liberal Democrats is in question, not only here but in the House of Lords. We have even seen the sad prospect of Lord Taverne voting for the closed list. Quite contrary to what the Home Secretary asserts, Lord Taverne once established that a named candidate could beat the party.

Lord Rodgers, now the Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, is very much in the mould of his predecessor, Lord Jenkins, but without

Lord Jenkins's common touch. After all his changes of party, he has voted for the closed list. In this whole debate, after the Home Secretary, the Liberal Democrats have come out with least credit.

The argument has gone solidly against the Government. It has gone against them in Parliament and outside. *The Times* continues to condemn the measure, as do other newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) is laughing. When Labour Members vote at the views of the *Daily Mail*, I wonder why the spin doctors, such as Alastair Campbell, spend so much time trying to win that newspaper's support.

Having lost every argument on the issue, the Government are now desperately trying to get going a debate on the Lords versus the people. It is the only argument they have. It is a little late for that argument, however, as one cannot run up a flag of democracy for an anti-democratic measure. This is an anti-democratic measure because it transfers power from the people to the party. *[Interruption.]* It puts power in the hands of the party bosses. That is the essence of the proposal, and that is why the House of Lords is entirely right to check that power. If the Government want a debate on the House of Lords, that is fine by us. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Caplin, you must be quiet. You must calm down.

Sir Norman Fowler: If the Government want a debate on the House of Lords, that is fine by us. They will find few people in their party, or anywhere else, who agree with their concept of a House of Lords of placemen and appointees, a giant quango of men and women who are on the list only because they can be relied on to vote for the Government. The Government do not want a second Chamber that takes an independent line. They do not want a second Chamber that exercises independent judgment. This Government cannot bear to be criticised, they cannot bear to be questioned and, above all, they cannot bear to be defeated. They reveal themselves in their true colours. The Government are arrogant, and that arrogance, sooner or later, will bring them crashing down.

5.30 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I wish to make it clear that I have abstained on this issue throughout, but I have done so with a heavy heart. I do not want the Conservatives to exploit what is, for many people, an issue of conscience. There has been too much banter and not enough substance to the debate on the problem. I am against not only the list system, but proportional representation itself. The problem is PR. I have not yet come across a more sensible system than our current one, although I am open to debate on another occasion.

I wish that we could have discussed every option, but we are unfortunately not in that situation. We now have trench warfare. Throughout history, both sides have been damaged in trench warfare. In this case, both sides will suffer and democracy will be no better off for it. My abstention is based on my belief in democracy and my belief that I am accountable to a constituency. I have the right to stand for election as a human being, on the party ticket but not as a mere cog in a party machine. That is not why I am in Parliament.

If I get the sack from the people, so be it, but I would rather be sacked by the people than through the fiddling of a party list controlled by people who are almost unknown. I am not against the Labour Government, but I feel strongly that we need a system that allows the expression of the people's opinion to be heard and counted correctly.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): My hon. Friend has so far argued on the merits of the issue. Does he also argue that the unelected and undemocratic House of Lords has the right to overrule the House of Commons, even when a general commitment to a proportional electoral system was in our manifesto?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may not have been present at the time, but I have already made the point that we are not debating the structure of the House of Lords or its powers. We are debating the amendments before us.

Mr. Michie: I have no truck with the hereditary peers or the Tory party. It is ironic that some Conservatives do not like the so-called closed-list system, but they support a closed list that has lasted longer than any other—the hereditary peers, who are selected by the elite. I do not want the same to happen to the House of Commons or to our democratic voting system. The closed list does not give total freedom of choice to the electorate. Fortunately, my abstention will not rock the Government, and it may be a futile gesture, but I feel that I have to make it.

I do not doubt that the present system leaves much to be desired, but the breaking of links with the present constituency system is wrong. The proposed system will not help democracy in any way. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made the point that we have no real choice if we have to choose between an inadequate system and an even more inadequate system. That is the dilemma that I and many other people face. It is not that we have no confidence in the Labour Government or that the Tories have any better ideas. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was very kind today because he said that he wanted the system changed to give other people a chance. He is also being kind in allowing the Tories to have a platform, because since the election they have not had one and that is why they are so enthusiastic about the issue.

We all worry that the European Parliament elections are viewed with scepticism and cynicism. We worry about the low turnout, but that is not because of the first-past-the-post system. It is because people are cynical about the European Parliament. They cannot feel any enthusiasm about it because it is so remote, and that is why they do not turn out to vote. Therefore, I cannot understand why we would wish to introduce a system that makes even the candidate remote. The candidate will be no longer a person, but a part of a party machine and that will make matters worse for European elections, not better. I will again abstain with a heavy heart, and I hope that my comrades will understand.

Mr. Allan: I approach this afternoon's debate with the same feelings as someone about to take the driving test for the fifth time—slightly nauseous and with my customary optimism dimmed by the previous four failures. However, unlike someone who has failed the driving test, we have

[Mr. Allan]

passed the test in this House on four previous occasions with considerable majorities. What has happened is that the tester has asked a panel of people descended from his grandfather's friends for a second opinion, and sent it back to us on that basis.

I am pleased to follow my neighbour, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), whose views I respect, even though they differ from my own, on this as on many other subjects. I know that he holds them with great sincerity. In deference to the hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), another neighbour, I shall try not to refer to the first-past-the-post system as the closed list of one. Instead, I shall refer to it as a system in which the electorate have no option but to vote for the single candidate selected by the party if they wish to vote for that party. I hope that that more accurate and snappy rendition will satisfy him.

The people last year elected a Government with a mandate to bring in fair votes for Europe. Two thirds of the people in this country gave their votes to parties committed to that principle. This elected Chamber has now voted four times for the Bill to be passed without further amendment. If the Conservatives hold to their belief that their opposition should be loyal and democratic, they should stop playing partisan games and let the people cast their verdict on the system in the elections next year.

At worst, the closed-list system has been said to be an affront to democracy because party machines can be less than perfectly democratic in ordering their candidates. The Labour party has done its best to give us examples to highlight the problem for us, but party machines at least have to seek a mandate for their internal processes from their many hundreds of thousands of members. However much I deplore what sometimes happens in some parties, when it comes to a contest about democratic legitimacy, what happens within parties still strikes me as infinitely more democratic than allowing decisions to be made by those selected by heredity. Labour Members who are angry about selection processes should consider that.

Tonight, we have a choice: we are offered an election system decided by the democratic majority in this House, which involves a considerable degree of party influence in ordering candidates; or we are offered the alternative of an election system, chosen by the other place by people who owe their power to an accident of birth and who will combine with the hand of God arbitrarily to choose which candidates are elected from entirely open lists.

Mr. Lansley: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that it is perfectly possible, even under the system proposed by the other place, for the Government to ask that parties structure the open list in the order of party preference? What the Lords want, and what that would allow, is for those who support a party to be able to choose which candidate they want.

Mr. Allan: That is fine for the candidates at the top of the list—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is interested in this matter, but his hon. Friends seem keen to engage him in debate. His proposal would suit the top person on the list, and it would be fine in my party's case, where only the top person is likely to win through in many cases. However, it would not suit the second, third or fourth person on the list. Under the system proposed by the Conservatives, only one cross goes in the box. Will they tell their supporters that the list is ordered, and that those whose house numbers begin with one should vote for the first candidate, and those whose house numbers begin with two should vote for the second, and so on? There are fundamental flaws in that system.

Labour Members should realise that the option of our choice is by far the more democratic of the alternatives on offer. They can, at least, be elected to their national executive committee, but they have no hope of becoming Lord Muck of Nether Regions. I am conscious that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) contradicts that point, having been a peer in the past, and having no chance of being elected to the NEC, but Labour Members can change their party's processes if the will exists for change.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): This is the fourth or fifth time I have heard the hon. Gentleman speak on this matter. Perhaps he will give me a straight answer to a simple question. What is his preferred option? I do not want to know what he will vote for, but what he believes in.

Mr. Allan: For the fourth or fifth time, my view is that the open-list system is preferable, but that the system proposed in the amendment is not the one. We prefer the Belgian open-list system, which we proposed in Committee, for which we voted, and on which the Conservatives failed to support us. Irrespective of the merits of selection on the list process, members of any political party have the ability to alter the list through internal mechanisms. That option is not available to those who wish to change decisions made by people in the other place, to which we have no right of entry.

I feel a need to address my comments principally to the Conservatives who are, once again, backing a Lords amendment. I hope that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition will think about their duty at this eleventh hour. An imperfect system is on the table, and I have admitted to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) that it is an imperfect system, and that it is not the ideal that the Liberal Democrats would propose if we were in power. However, the Government have agreed to a system that will introduce proportionality to the European elections for the first time, although it does not extend voter choice when it comes to candidates. We would like to extend voter choice, but we have accepted the Government's decision. When the matter was debated, and voted on, in Committee, we accepted that the Government had made their decision.

The latest last-minute attempts to amend the Bill are futile, and they are designed chiefly to obstruct the Bill rather than seriously to improve it. The fact that the specific system proposed in the Lords amendment has some clear flaws only adds to that impression. Evidence that the amendment is a ploy to block the Bill appears in the words of the Conservative spokesman in the other place, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish. At the Committee stage, Lord Mackay made two interesting points. First, he criticised systems in which people could be elected with fewer personal votes than others who were not elected, calling such an outcome "manifestly unfair". As the Home Secretary has said, that is precisely what could happen as a result of the amendment. We cannot understand why that shift should have taken place.

Secondly, Lord Mackay proposed precisely the kind of review proposed by the Government amendment in lieu. He told the Committee that he was "a realist", that he accepted that next year's elections would be under a closed-list system and that the most important thing was that there should be a review. He even ventured to suggest that the closed-list system might actually work, saying that, if all went "swimmingly and excellently", the Government would

"have nothing to fear at all."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 June 1998; Vol. 591, c. 355.]

Why is it, then, that, when the Conservatives are being offered exactly what they wanted in Committee, they appear to want to change the democratic will of the House of Commons? Our conclusion must be that they are seeking to achieve a partisan goal of preserving an unfair voting system, irrespective of any constitutional principle that is broken along the way.

What would happen if the Conservatives withdrew their support for the amendment? The elections would go ahead with a less-than-perfect system, but we would have a fairer voting system, which appeared in manifestos supported by the majority of the electorate. It would mean for the first time that every vote cast in Britain would count. Far from talking down the turnout, all parties would have an incentive to get out every vote in every part of the country. There would be no more electoral deserts once we moved to the proposed system.

5.45 pm

I ask the Conservatives to consider the point at which a revising chamber becomes a blocking chamber. It has become clear during the course of our debate that the Lords amendment is not a simple revision, but a fundamental issue facing the Government. Whatever the Government's reasons for their decision, and however unhappy or happy some of their supporters are about it, it was their decision, and they are the elected Government. The Conservatives themselves describe the amendment as an issue of fundamental principle. In that case, there is no argument for saying that the other place is merely tidying up the Bill, or revising it at the margins. The other place is raising a fundamental issue of principle. The Government take one view, the peers take another. It is clear that the elected will should prevail.

To continue to seek to reverse the Government's decision once it has been so clearly made is not, in any sense, to seek to revise the legislation. It is an explicit challenge to the Bill as a whole. I must ask the official Opposition whether they see their role as one of blocking legislation for which the Government have a mandate, and which two parties that commanded 60 per cent. of the vote last year espoused at the general election and have consistently supported in Parliament ever since.

The Conservatives have called the people to their aid throughout the debate, claiming to act on the people's behalf against the party machines. I challenge the Opposition to let the people have their will as expressed at the ballot box on 1 May 1997, when they voted for parties committed to electoral reform. Let the people give their verdict on the system in the Bill. We have heard much pre-judgment about what the people will or will not accept for the elections. We have heard apocalyptic visions of how the system will mean that the people will not bother to vote. However, we should give the people the chance to make their own decision about the system next June. If they do hate it, the Conservatives can have the satisfaction of saying, "Told you so."

There is a firm commitment to a review. I assure the Conservatives that the Liberal Democrats will play an active role in that review, and we shall campaign with anyone for change where problems have been identified. If the Conservatives have any confidence in their own abilities, they should work on the assumption that they can win a general election before the European elections of 2004. They would then have the chance to outline their own ideas for a better voting system. It could be a key part of the Conservative manifesto, and the party could seek its own mandate for a reversion to the first-past-the-post system.

Until then, the Conservatives should make a careful judgment about when loyal and effective opposition slips into a bloody-minded, partisan attempt to frustrate change for which there is a mandate. The official Opposition can no longer hide behind the fact that there is no explicit mandate for a technical aspect of the Bill. It is absolutely clear that the whole Bill is at stake now.

I ask my hon. Friends to use their votes, once again, to help the Bill on to the statute book. If it passes, every citizen in Britain will next year, for the first time in a national election, have a chance to cast a vote with real value. We shall not support the Conservative amendment. We shall back the Government's call for a review.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Like a bad film, this is where we came in, and came in, and came in, and came in. I am told that there have been astonishing scenes in the other place during the past week. Apparently there were more Range Rovers than ever before in the car park, and some people had to ask their way to the Chamber. There is an undelicious irony in the fact that the other place is lecturing the House of Commons on the essence of democracy.

Those hereditary peers who sit in the other place have never stood in elections, and know nothing about elections, yet they are telling us how to run elections. They are wilfully overturning a clear Government commitment to introducing a system of proportional representation for the European elections. They are, in effect, allowing themselves yet again to be Mr. Hague's poodle. They are signing their own death warrant and their actions are totally self-defeating. The essence of the matter is that they know that time is running out for the Government and that the alternative is the first-past-the-post system.

The Conservatives are, as always, against any change. If there were to be a first-past-the-post system for the European elections next May, the major casualties would be Conservative candidates. The Government, in their enormous beneficence, have provided a system that will help to raise the Conservative party's corpse from the dead.

Mr. Lansley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anderson: No, I want to be brief.

Perhaps the Conservatives' motive is to reduce the number of Conservative MEPs because they know that, when they go to Brussels and Strasbourg, they tend to go native and might not support party policy.

[Mr. Anderson]

I accept that open and closed lists are not a barricades issue or a great issue of principle. The arguments are finely balanced. The closed-list system ensures that women and people from ethnic minorities can have their rightful place in the list.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): As a woman from an ethnic minority who succeeded under first past the post, I ask my hon. Friend whether he thinks that the closed-list system proposed tonight would be passed in the House on a free vote.

Mr. Anderson: I am not a Whip, I have never been a Whip and I am unlikely ever to be a Whip, and my arithmetic is very bad, so I would not like to answer that question.

The open-list argument is based on simple fallacy—the argument that it is more democratic. It is as if there were, on the Rousseau analogy, a forest clearing in Switzerland where the citizens meet and decide who are the best to go forward in their name. Surely the essence of multi-member constituencies is that they are all large and the individuals will be known only to a very few of the electorate. An election can therefore degenerate into a beauty contest between media stars. I know of other open-list systems in which there are several party members, but they are a recipe for internal party strife and an investment in the worst sort of populism.

It is absolutely clear that this is not a debate about a great principle; it is surely no more than a device used by the Opposition to embarrass the Government and kill off a Bill.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I thought that, with the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), we would at last have a Labour Back Bencher supporting the Government, but of course he did nothing of the sort. The speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) on behalf of the Liberal Democrats demonstrated once again that he prefers open lists but will vote for closed lists. So much for principle and the Liberal Democrats.

This is the fifth debate on the European Parliamentary Elections Bill in which I have taken part. I do not intend to repeat myself, so I shall be brief.

Certain misconceptions have arisen, particularly during the past few weeks. The first, which was said on the "Today" programme yesterday and has been repeated in a number of newspapers and stated by the Home Secretary, is that the Lords are acting deliberately to frustrate a Labour party manifesto commitment. That is either sloppy journalism or the Labour party spin doctors have been working extremely hard, because it is not true. The Labour party manifesto commitment was simple: there would be elections for the European Parliament on a regional basis and by proportional representation. None of the amendments that have been returned to the House in the past few weeks by the Lords has contested those points.

The second misconception is that we already have closed lists for Westminster parliamentary elections; it has been put forward by the Home Secretary time and time again. He knows that it is pure sophistry on his part. We all know that in our selection systems hundreds of local people and supporters make selections from hundreds of candidates. That is not a closed-list system such as the system that the Home Secretary intends to operate, in which the order of the candidates and their likelihood of being elected would be determined by Millbank tower.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): My hon. Friend is absolutely right about how candidates in our party are selected, but in the Labour party, candidates such as the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth) are simply parachuted in by the central party.

Mr. Sayeed: My hon. Friend makes a perfectly fair point. If the Labour party had a selection system similar to ours, it would not be in its current difficulties.

The third misconception is that it is for a political party alone to decide its selection procedures. If a proposed law permits an undemocratic system that ignores the wishes of the local people and promotes those of the party machine, it is right for either of the Houses of Parliament to try to amend that law. That is not simply a matter for parties, because democracy is a matter for Parliament.

Mr. Bermingham: Surely it is for a party to decide how it will select its candidates. That is an entirely internal matter. If one has a dispute with an internal system, one fights it internally. That is not a matter in which outside bodies should interfere unless it is contrary to natural law.

Mr. Sayeed: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. A law that would permit an anti-democratic system is a bad law.

Mr. Allan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sayeed: No. I wish to be brief.

The fourth misconception is that expressions of support for the Government can be counted only in the voting lists. Anyone who knows how Labour Whips work, who knows the power of the Patronage Secretary—that name is not given lightly—and who knows the brutal tactics of Millbank tower will know that many Labour Members are dead against the party's proposals for closed lists but will vote as their Whips dictate. Labour Back Benchers' thoughts are demonstrated not by votes but by how they have spoken during the five debates and by the fact that not one has given whole-hearted support to his Front Benchers.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I am as whole-hearted as I am likely to be in supporting any Government measure.

Mr. Sayeed: If that is whole-hearted, I would hate the hon. Gentleman to be agin me, because I would still not understand whether he was agin me or for me. It sounded as though he was sitting on the fence. If he wants to be a great supporter of the Government's measure, all I can say is that he is the first.

The ability to resolve the dilemma is in the Government's hands. They can make sure that they fulfil their manifesto commitment to conduct regional elections

to the European Parliament on a PR basis. All they need to do is abandon closed lists. Alternatively, they might be able to get away with it in the Lords if they undertook to operate closed lists as we intend to operate them. If they do neither, the loss of the Bill will be the Labour Government's fault. They will deserve all they get.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): This is the first time I have spoken in the many debates on the Bill, but I felt the need to speak tonight. As I have done on every occasion, I shall support the Government tonight, even though I am 150 per cent. committed to the first-past-the-post system.

The Bill fulfils a manifesto commitment. I know that that is a strange concept to the Conservatives, which is part of the reason why they are on the Opposition Benches. A proportional system was endorsed as part of the Labour party manifesto in the general election. The only arguments left are on implementation. However improbable it may seem, a closed list is obviously the best system of implementation for the regions in question. For a region such as Yorkshire, with 5.5 million voters, it is nonsense to suggest that people in Redcar will recognise someone from Sheffield, 90 miles away.

6 pm

Mr. Lansley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the one set of people who are likely to be recognised by the voters and to attract support in a European election are existing MEPs? Will he therefore remind the House how many existing Labour MEPs have been placed by his party in a winnable position on his party's lists?

Mr. Rooney: The hon. Gentleman is wise enough to know that most of us in this House are far less recognised than we would like, and that is even more true of MEPs, with the larger constituencies that they represent. One of the greatest fallacies perpetuated by politicians is the weight of their personal vote. The personal vote is nonsense. Personal identification is nonsense, except in a small number of cases. *[Interruption.]* I do not even mind saying in my own case that personal identification is nonsense. In the Bradford, North constituency in the 1997 general election, whoever was the Labour candidate would have won. It was not Terry Rooney who won. I might have made five votes difference in a positive sense—or lost 100 votes, for all I know.

What matters is not the individual, but the party. We know that that is overwhelmingly the case. That is why the closed-list system is much simpler and easier for the electorate to understand and deal with than a ballot paper with 50, 60 or 70 names on it. If we look at the local council elections in London this year, and the number of votes that each party's candidate got in each seat, we see that, without exception the candidate placed highest on the list got the most votes, and the next highest on the list of that party got the second highest number of votes.

That is the system proposed for the European elections, which would mean that voters had to read down a list of perhaps 50 names to identify the seven or eight candidates who were Conservative, Labour or whatever—what nonsense.

The real concerns about the closed-list system relate to the ranking order, but those are internal matters for a political party. The day this House tries to interfere with the rule book of a political party is the day this House dies. The political parties must determine their own rules.

I shall support the measure tonight, and I beg the House to do so too.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I apologise to the House for the fact that I missed the first part of the debate. As you are aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was chairing a Standing Committee.

I shall make a straightforward contribution on behalf of my constituents in North Thanet and those living in the Euro-constituency of East Kent, in which I also live.

At Question Time this afternoon, the Prime Minister told the House that this was a device of the Tory hereditary peers designed to wreck a piece of legislation that the House wanted. You know me well enough, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to know that I would not for one moment suggest that the Prime Minister misled the House, but there is some case for saying that he tried to mislead the British public who might have been watching on television.

The matter has nothing to do with Tory hereditary peers. The argument is simple. It concerns the right of the individual elector to vote for an individual candidate of the party of his or her choosing. The rest is a smokescreen. I shall give two examples—one theoretical and one literal—of the practical effect, beginning with the literal example.

For the past four and a half years, the Euro-constituency of East Kent has been represented by a Labour Member. There are many things that that Member has not done which might have furthered the interests of his constituents, which is a source of some criticism. There are things that he has done which are also a source of criticism. Specifically, he claims authorship of the European ferry passenger registration directive, which will affect the livelihoods of people working on the cross-channel ferries.

Hon. Members may not be aware that, if that directive is introduced, it will require every man, woman and child travelling back and forth across the channel to register their name, age and sex, before travelling. As a result, the queues from the channel ports will stretch far back along the roads, and the ferries will be disadvantaged. One MEP has been responsible for that legislation, which has deeply angered his constituents. I cannot tell whether that anger will manifest itself to such a degree that he will be ejected from his seat at the next election, but I know that the electorate of East Kent want the opportunity to voice judgment on his stewardship of his seat.

Under the proposals before us, that MEP has been placed by the Labour party at the top of the list. Unless nobody in East Kent or the south-east votes Labour—dream on—that MEP will be there for life, provided that he stays on-message and keeps his nose clean. That cannot be democratic.

Let us consider a theoretical situation.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gale: No. The hon. Gentleman intervenes on virtually everyone. I want to be brief.

Consider the case of a Labour voter who is anti-abortion and wants to vote for candidates to his or her moral liking. If that voter casts a vote and if the

[Mr. Gale]

Labour candidate at the top of the list is pro-abortion, the voter is inevitably voting for a moral principle that he or she abhors. That is not democratic.

No, the issue is nothing to do with the hereditary peerage. It is to do with the right of one voter to exercise his or her vote for the candidate of his or her choice, of whatever political party and moral persuasion.

The Prime Minister said at Question Time this afternoon—with considerable arrogance, some of us felt—that, were we to go back to the old system—the one that everyone understands, first past the post, one member one seat, win or lose—the Conservative party would indubitably win fewer seats in the European elections. That is a chance that we are prepared to take in defence of a principle: the right of the individual to exercise his or her vote as he or she wishes. That is the principle that the Prime Minister seeks to abolish.

Mr. Bermingham: I was sad that the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) would not let me intervene, and accused me of intervening all over the place. I do not. I intervene only when an hon. Member makes a patently bad point, as I see it. I expect that others intervene in my speeches if I make patently bad points. That is what the Chamber is all about—at least, it used to be when the hon. Gentleman and I first came here. There seems to be a little intolerance in the Opposition these days, but these things happen. He well knows that, under the current system, if a Member has what is called a safe seat, he or she will be there for life—assuming that that Member obeys the party rules.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because he has just made a patently bad point. If a so-called safe seat ensured that a Member was elected for life, 100 of my former colleagues would be sitting beside me this evening. However, under first past the post, they were thrown out.

Mr. Bermingham: That is because they were patently not safe seats. So we return to the subject at hand.

I have spoken several times about this matter, and I am sad that my old and hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) is not in the Chamber. I intended to try to persuade him not to waste his vote by abstaining. That is what one does when one abstains: one makes no point one way or the other.

We have reached a situation where the Government—my party—wish to put their political will before the country. At the end of the day, the people will decide whether the system is good or bad. If the system is bad, they will thump us. The Government wish to introduce a system that will be reviewed in due course. At this stage—on the fifth occasion—surely the House of Commons has the right to tell the Lords that this is the will of the people.

The measure was in the manifesto, and it has been accepted by members of the governing party. Labour Members are not rolling about the aisles in rebellion. I accept that there has been the odd vote against the measure and the odd abstention—such is the entitlement of any hon. Member. However, the overwhelming bulk of the Government party has voted consistently for the measure in its present form.

I say to the Lords: that is the will of the people. If their will as expressed by the Government is wrong, the people will surely tell us by voting against us. The next referendum—as it were—on this subject should be in June next year. It is time that this ping-pong farce ended.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In response to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), I contend that, if the voters had wanted a closed-list system, we would have seen some evidence of that desire. If the focus groups had suggested to the Government that the people wanted a closed-list system, it would have been stated specifically in the Labour party manifesto. The truth is that not a single party represented in the House included the closed-list system in its manifesto. It is worth repeating the words of the bishop who said last night in another place:

"I believe that we shall be doing the right thing by the democratic principles which have prevailed in this country for a very long time."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 1148.]

There are two constitutional principles involved. The first is that the governing party with a majority in the House of Commons should expect to get its way. If the Government were to accept the amendments, they would still have a proportional representation system—albeit not the one on which they have lately decided to insist. The second principle is that the second Chamber tries to defend the rights of the voters. For example, the House of Lords has the opportunity of preventing the House from extending the life of a Parliament. Those are the kinds of democratic principle that the second Chamber represents.

We turn to the question of support for the form of proportional representation that the Government are attempting to force through Parliament. This time, I will put my question to the House, not the Minister. Will those Labour Back Benchers who embrace the closed-list system as their personal preference intervene on me now? Not one Labour Back Bencher is prepared to state that that is his or her personal preference.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): Was the hon. Gentleman not in the Chamber earlier this evening when several Labour Members spoke in favour of precisely that system?

Mr. Bottomley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will bear witness to the fact that even the Minister has not declared that the closed-list system is his personal preference. The hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) said that he was 150 per cent. behind the single-member constituency. I have made my point. The Minister failed to answer my question during his winding-up speech on Monday: he could not name one Labour Back Bencher who has disclosed that this system is his or her personal preference. We know how the Government Whips can force Labour Members through the Lobby.

Let us turn to the only other significant argument in this debate, which was advanced by the noble Lord Callaghan in the other place. He pointed out that the Government were offering a review that would make it possible to introduce a better system. By proposing that the Lords should go quietly because a review is promised, he acknowledges that the closed-list system is not the best system even in his view.

My conviction is that the other place will be justified if it decides to hold to its view that the voters should be able to cast their votes for individual candidates and influence who represents them, and to decide that it should not be left to the parties to put names on a closed list. I believe that the other place will be right to say that the Government's insistence on their course of action is unjustified and undemocratic.

6.15 pm

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): I have three questions that I hope will introduce new points into the debate and be addressed by the Opposition.

My first question concerns the nature of the system that the Opposition propose. They favour not the so-called Belgian open-list system—which the Government considered and rejected—but the Finnish open-list system. As far as I can establish, that system is used by only two countries in the European Union—Finland and Luxembourg—and I have not heard any Labour or Liberal Democrat Member speak in support of it. The system prevents voters from voting for parties: they can vote only for candidates. That leads me to my first vital question.

Mr. Lansley: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House why the Government have chosen not to return to another place, in lieu of the Lords amendments, an amendment in favour of the Belgium list system, if that is the system that he—by implication—and the Liberal Democrats support?

Mr. Linton: The Government considered that course of action and decided against it.

Mr. Lansley: Why?

Mr. Linton: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman ask the Minister.

My first question for the Opposition is: how will the system work? How will you order your candidates on your list? As I understand it, there are only two ways to do that under this system. You can put the candidates either in alphabetical or in random order. Should you decide to put your candidates in alphabetical order—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) keeps using the term "you". I do not have any candidates to put in order—at least, not yet.

Mr. Linton: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was of course referring to potential Conservative candidates. I have a copy of the Conservative party's list of candidates for the European elections, who are listed under the party name. If those candidates were re-listed alphabetically, Javad Arain, who is currently No. 4, would jump into first place in the east midlands. This is a perfectly relevant question, because that is precisely what happens in Finland. That country has an alphabetocracy: the people whose names begin with the letters A and B are much more likely to be elected.

In the eastern region, Sir Graham Bright—former Parliamentary Private Secretary to the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—would find himself in first place on the list. Most interestingly, Lord Bethell—who is now at No. 3—would go to No. 1 on the list for London. Before we take this proposal seriously, the Opposition must explain how the system would work.

My second question concerns Lord Bethell. When the issue was debated in the House of Lords last night, two of the three Conservative peers who are standing in the European elections voted with the Opposition. The third, Lord Bethell, did not vote.

I ask myself why Lord Bethell did not vote. We may have a clue—

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): From the list.

Mr. Linton: No; we may have a clue from the letter that Lord Bethell wrote to *The Daily Telegraph*, which said:

"The open list offers a choice so wide as to be confusing, especially since hardly any of the several hundred candidates whose names will be put forward have any public profile. Ballot papers will carry 50 or more names. Hardly anyone will know them. Voters will mark their crosses at random."

That is the view of the most senior Conservative peer who has already been a Member of the European Parliament expressing his views on the Opposition motion. He went on:

"A change to the open list will also cause conflict between candidates of the same party, who will be competing as much against their colleagues as against their adversaries. One advantage of the closed list is that in London, for instance—where I hope to stand—all 10 of us Conservatives are in the same 'job lot'. A vote for one is a vote for us all."

Those are the views of the most prominent Member of the House of Lords who is a candidate in the European elections. How does he square that with Conservative Front-Bench support in the House of Commons for a system that he has denounced?

My third question is intended to be helpful: have Opposition Front Benchers considered the effect on their own party lists were—heaven forbid—that system to be adopted? If there were seven, eight or nine names on a list in alphabetical order, and a vote could be registered only by voting for one of those candidates, there would be increased temptation for people to vote for Europhile or Europhobe Conservative candidates. There would immediately be a campaign to support the Europhobe candidates, which would no doubt be backed by a large sum of money. Many voters would want to move those candidates to the top of the list.

On the other hand, Conservative voters, in their maturity, may prefer the Europhile candidates, and may fill the European Parliament—

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does that not precisely illustrate the point about voter choice? The system proposed by the other place would give voters the ability to make that choice, which the Government's proposals would deny them.

Mr. Linton: That illustrates the point very well, but can Conservative Members explain what would happen if Conservative voters returned to the European Parliament only pro-European Conservative MEPs? Those MEPs would stand on their own manifesto as pro-Europeans and pro-single currency, but we understand that the Conservative party manifesto puts off a single currency until the election after the election after next. On whose manifesto would those MEPs be elected—their own, or the party's?

[Mr. Linton]

As soon as Conservative Members introduced that dog's breakfast of a system, they would have not only serious problems with different campaigns for Europhile and Europhobe candidates, but a complete lack of clarity about who those people would represent and on whose manifesto they were elected. It would be in the interests of the whole House if Opposition Front Benchers admitted that they supported the amendment, of which they know little, for opportunistic reasons. If it were enacted, it would damage their party more than any other.

Mr. Lansley: The debate is becoming positively surreal on the Government Benches: we have arrived at a point at which the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) is trying to protect the Conservative party from internal divisions and debate over Europe. I had thought that the opposite was precisely the Government's objective, on all occasions.

The hon. Member for Battersea does that because—as distinct from his speech on Monday night—he did not want to explain his own preference. That preference was clearly stated on Monday: he favoured an open list.

Mr. Linton: The Belgian list.

Mr. Lansley: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to converse with his Front Benchers about why they did not adopt a Belgian list. Of course, that was not the Conservative party's proposal; we have been clear all the way about through the fact that we would prefer the election to be fought under the first-past-the-post system.

The Government said in their manifesto that they wanted a proportional representation system. The Liberal Democrats support such a system—they want the Belgian system, as does the hon. Member for Battersea—and the overwhelming majority of Labour Members who have spoken want a PR system and an open list. The Belgian system is available to them; why have the Government said no? They have said no for one reason: they want a closed list. Why do they want a closed list? They want to dictate who is elected as a Labour Member of the European Parliament. They do not want the electorate to choose, and they do not even want Labour party supporters to choose; they want to choose themselves.

As was rightly said in the other place, a choice has to be made between the electorate and the selectorate—the selectorate of the Millbank tower panels, which have chosen the lists for the Labour party. That is the decision that has to be made. The Lords returning the Bill to this place, amended on each occasion, is far from being an affront to democracy; they have done so in pursuance of democracy, because they seek to defend voter choice.

I have read the debates in the Lords, and hon. Members will know that I have attended the debates in the Chamber on each occasion. It is perfectly clear that, on each occasion, the Lords have not been dragooned into going in this direction by the Conservatives. Cross-Bench peers have overwhelmingly chosen to send those amendments back to this House, and the decisions have been made on the balance of the argument. Each time, they have been fed by the simple fact that, in debates in this House, Members of the governing party have been unwilling to support their Front Benchers.

That is what gave the Lords the impetus to send the Bill back amended, and they have been challenging the Government to have the honesty to follow the line of argument that is supported by Labour Members.

From the corner of my eye, I see that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) wants me to give way.

Mr. Allan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I have been listening to his case with interest. I have much sympathy with what he says about voter choice, but does he agree with two propositions? The first is that the proposed closed-list system is no worse than the first-past-the-post system, which also presents candidates selected by a small number of party members. The second is that the logic of his position must inevitably lead him to suggest that in a Westminster election he should be selected by the entire electorate and should put himself forward with other Conservative candidates, rather than rely on a small selectorate of party members.

Mr. Lansley: Two propositions were put, but they are essentially one. I do not accept either, because the constituency link—this would be true for the European Parliament—on the basis of one member, one seat is wholly to be preferred.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I check this point with the hon. Gentleman, so that people outside the House are clear about what is argued? Is he agreeing with Lord Bethell, who said that, under the Tory proposals, ballot papers would

"carry 50 or more names"

and that an individual elector would have to pick names out of the 50 and tick them off? Is that what he proposes?

Mr. Lansley: No. The hon. Gentleman is wrong on that, first, because the Bill specifies that, under the regulations that are to be made, a party cannot present more candidates than there are places up for election. Secondly, as I read the Bill, it is perfectly possible for the Government to specify that a party should present its candidates, not in an alphabetical or an arbitrary list, but in a list of that party's preference. It is therefore perfectly possible for the electorate to be presented with a party's preferences, but the voters would be able to choose from within that list and not be bound to accept the preference of the party apparatchiks.

The Home Secretary made an absurd point about perverse results and someone from one party being elected although he had fewer votes than someone from another party. The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that that is accurate statistically, but he will not recognise that it is directly the result of proportionality. He has argued in debate after debate that, primarily, people vote on the basis of party—yes, indeed. In a proportional system, that means that people will be elected from that party's list first, rather than elected from another party's list.

What the Home Secretary will not accept—he should listen to this—is that, even within a preference for party, voters may have a preference between individual candidates. That is what it comes down to. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) said—this is true for the

electoral system in this country that we are used to—that voters want to be able to choose an individual candidate. That is what the Home Secretary sets out to deny.

6.30 pm

Mrs. Laing: It has been fascinating to listen yet again to a debate on the complexities and anomalies of proportional representation systems, as set out by the Home Secretary and other Labour Members, in particular the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton). Again, the Home Secretary has advanced excellent arguments for keeping first past the post, although he will not welcome my saying that, and will not admit to it. He knows that he has lost the argument, so he blames our constitutional system, which allows members in another place to revise what we have discussed in this place—our well-trusted and long-standing constitutional system.

We have heard much about closed lists, open lists and individuals. In Epping Forest, we are individuals. I was elected as a Conservative candidate, but I have, unusually, a bit of support from some non-Conservatives. Therefore, it is a pleasure to put forward the view of a party that has no representation in the House.

Labour Members have argued that opposition to the clause is confined mostly to hereditary members of another place. That is not true. Our position on these Benches is supported by a wide range of fair-minded people who believe in and seek to defend democracy: for example, the Epping Forest Democratic Left. The secretary of that august organisation, a Mr. Peter Relph, has written an excellent letter to the *West Essex Gazette*, an excellent publication, which is known, if not to all hon. Members, certainly to the Home Secretary and to me.

Mr. Peter Relph has written to the editor of my local paper:

"Dear Sir

Our Member of Parliament"—

I will leave out the flattering bits—

"is to be congratulated on her work with the Electoral Reform Society and other democrats including the majority of the House of Lords who seek to ensure that the new voting procedures for the European Elections to be held next May . . . will be open, fair and democratic."

He goes on to pay tribute to the Home Secretary, who, as he has acknowledged, was once Mr. Relph's next-door neighbour, or something close to it; I will also leave out the flattering bits about the Home Secretary.

Mr. Relph goes on to say:

"The 'closed' list is one of candidates hand selected by an unelected cabal meeting in smoke filled rooms who will ensure that independent minded 'socialist' . . . personalities . . . will never be on the ballot paper."

I did not expect to find myself in such agreement with Mr. Relph and the Epping Forest Democratic Left. I do not agree with all that they say, but I respect their right to say it.

Conservative Members have been wondering of what the Home Secretary and his Government are afraid. We have concluded that it is of free thinkers in his party.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): On free thinking, will the hon. Lady clarify this matter? Will the Conservative party allow its candidates, who I understand you have placed in order of preference, to produce individual literature to put their case before the voters, or will you insist that all literature for the European elections will be under the Conservative party banner, with the list of candidates in the order that you wish the electorate to vote for them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Perhaps I should just say to the hon. Lady that that has nothing to do with me at all.

Mrs. Laing: I hope that the situation that the hon. Member for Don Valley (C roline Flint) has described will not be necessary, because I have every hope and confidence that we will fight the European elections next May under a first-past-the-post system.

From the evidence that we have heard tonight, it is obvious that no one who defends democracy can possibly support a system that gives more power to political parties by taking that power away from the people.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The Home Secretary would have better spent his time concentrating on the arguments, rather than drawing attention to the forefathers of their Lordships. Irrespective of whether their Lordships were appointed or achieved their peerage by birth, they were not genetically conditioned to vote against the Government. They found themselves in that Division Lobby on the strength of the arguments and not for any other reason. He would have done better to dwell on those arguments.

As I have pointed out before, I have certain base motives for wishing to support the Government on the amendment. I have never believed that the European Parliament was a Parliament at all. To hamper that assembly with an awful electoral system and to let all the frogs that are in the bog hatch out would suit me very well, but representative democracy is more important.

This afternoon, the Prime Minister drew attention several times to the fact that that dreadful voting system is shared by some of our European partners. That is not surprising. Their electoral systems arose after the advent of political parties—political parties organised the people—whereas our system predates the organisation of political parties.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Swayne: I am enjoined to be brief.

We have that rather idiosyncratic system of representative democracy. We have the technology now to do away with representative democracy, to have pure democracy, and to let every voter decide on every issue, yet we persist with a deliberative assembly, where Members representing their constituents make decisions.

That principle is fundamentally undermined by the system that the Home Secretary has brought before us. If we are to be represented by true representatives and not by political parties, as the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) said the previous time that we debated this issue, we must have the ability to get rid of representatives as well as to elect them. That is why it is vital that the list, insofar as we have a list at all, remains an open list.

Mr. Clappison: This has been a good and interesting debate. We are all becoming veterans of these occasions. This is the fourth time, I think, that we have considered

[Mr. Clappison]

the Lords amendments. We have also debated the matter twice in Committee and once on Report; and we had Second Reading, of course, as well.

I think that this is the first time that more than one Labour Member has spoken in favour of a closed-list system: two out of five have done so. One of the others was indeterminate, and two were against. I know that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), is optimistic, but he can hardly claim that the motion is being carried forward on a tidal wave of acclamation.

We began with the principled and thoughtful speech by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), who expressed his principled position, and made it clear that he was going to abstain in the name of democracy. He prefers to stand as an individual, rather than as a cog in a machine.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). He said that the arguments were finely balanced. In the end, I think that he came down in favour of the closed list, but I notice that he did not respond to the intervention by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who asked him whether the motion would be carried on a free vote in the Labour party, if there were one. I do not think that he was able to answer that.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clappison: No.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East said that he was not a very good Whip, but many others who have heard these debates could come to a different conclusion.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) made the point, with which I am inclined to agree, that a safe seat is only safe until one loses it. Many Conservative Members do not intend to come near that experience, but he hardly gave a ringing endorsement of the closed-list system.

I believe that this was the first occasion on which the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) had spoken in one of these debates. I do not know how many of them he has attended. In any event, he came out in favour of a closed list. He was worried about the confusion that he believed voters would experience as a result of seeing all those names on the ballot paper—a worry echoed by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was present for earlier proceedings, but I seem to recollect that, early in the Committee stage, we were told that the Government intended the names of all candidates to appear on the ballot paper in any event. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is making comments from a sedentary position. I venture to ask him what will be the feelings of the voters when they look at the ballot paper before casting their votes. Will they be unable to decide who to vote for, or—if there is a closed list—will they feel angry about the fact that the names are there but they are unable to express an individual preference? I think that many voters will want to do that.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) supports the concept of an open list. We finally dragged that out of him the other evening. He was prepared to pick holes in each of the systems involved, but, as an aficionado of electoral reform, he will know that there are eight systems of open-list voting in the European Union. The Government have been willing to pick holes in each and every one of them, and to support the closed-list system that the hon. Gentleman does not support. That is the answer to the questions put by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, will electors be faced with a ballot paper containing between 30 and 40 names, and have to tick the names of those they support?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman is missing the point. The names will appear on the ballot paper under the Government's proposal. Electors may feel angry about the fact that they cannot express an individual preference. The hon. Gentleman ought to wonder about what is happening in the other eight countries of the European Union, where this does not seem to have constituted an insurmountable problem. Eight countries have been able to operate an open-list system.

We have heard some very good speeches from Conservative Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) has been an assiduous attender of these debates, and has constantly warned of the danger of centralised control. Another excellent speech was made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who, as he pointed out, has been another assiduous attender. He rightly drew attention to the danger of dictatorial Government control.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), in a short but excellent speech, spoke up for the rights of the individual. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) made a colourful and passionate speech, in which he set out his principled view, and stood up for the rights of his constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) drew attention, quite fairly, to the wide support for the open-list system, which extends as far as the Epping Forest Popular Front.

In the Home Secretary's speech—and at Prime Minister's Question Time today, from the Liberal Democrats and, I think, from the Prime Minister at one point—we heard a suggestion that this was all being got up by the Opposition. On Radio 4's "Today" programme this morning, I heard the Home Secretary use the words "manufactured" and "synthetic" about our position. *[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Workington is heckling from a sedentary position. I do not know whether he was present for the Second Reading debate nearly a year ago, and it is against my better judgment to refer to what was said in the past, but we drew attention then to the defects of the closed list. We pressed the Home Secretary, and made abundantly clear our opposition to closed lists in principle.

6.45 pm

The strange thing is that the Home Secretary said then that he was prepared to listen to the arguments. He summed up the arguments on both sides. He expressed

a preference for a closed list, but he said that there were arguments on both sides. He said of the possible alternative—which he later rejected—

"As with any other system, there are arguments both ways. The modification of what we propose in the Bill would provide some direct voter preference and may assuage the concerns even of the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1998; Vol. 301, c.814.]

Why, we ask now, are the Government so keen to nail their colours to the mast of the closed list? They said then that they at least had an open mind, and were prepared to listen to representations. As we know, no representations were forthcoming in favour of the closed list. If the Home Secretary had wanted to adopt the Belgian list system, at least he would have been able to make the Liberal Democrats feel happy. The Liberal Democrats have been in favour of an open list, but have not been prepared to vote for it.

Mr. Allan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clappison: No. Time is short. I know what the hon. Gentleman wants to say, and I have already responded to his point. He should read the report of our last debate. That is another advantage of debating this matter on so many occasions.

We maintained our opposition to the closed-list system throughout the Committee, and on Report. In Committee, we said—commenting on what the Home Secretary had said—that we thought the situation remained

"as unsatisfactory as it was on Second Reading. We believe that a closed list system is a bad system. That one word that has been used to describe it is degrading. That is appropriate. It will not get our support in any circumstances."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 1998; Vol. 307 , c. 524.]

That continues to be our position, which we have maintained throughout our proceedings. We are against the closed list, and maintain a principled opposition to it. There is nothing manufactured or synthetic about our views.

What I suggest is manufactured and synthetic is the rage that the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister have sought to whip up about hereditary peers. Who can blame hereditary peers, or any other peers, for taking the view they took? Cross Benchers have always voted against the closed list by an overwhelming majority, and many other groups and individuals have made representations against it, including the Electoral Reform Society and Charter 88.

This is a rotten system. We agree strongly with the views expressed by Lord Shore of Stepney, who clarified the issue when he said:

"The issue is about the open list against the closed list. It is about an open democratic list against a closed party management list. It is about accountability to the electorate, to the voters, against accountability to a party committee—what we are now officially informed is a joint panel of regional representatives and members of the party's ruling National Executive Committee. It is indeed—I repeat the words I used on the previous occasion—the electorate versus the selectorate."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 851.]

That is the issue that remains at the end of all these debates: the right of an individual voter to make a choice, and the opportunity for an MEP to make his case before his constituents and win the support of his electors, whether they are in a constituency or a region. It is about the opportunity for an MEP to represent the interests of his constituency, or his region, rather than the diktat of central party control.

We think that the system imposed by the Government is riddled with opportunities for cronyism and centralised party control. It is the system that is the most favourable to the bosses in the larger parties in any country in Europe. The Prime Minister has said that other countries in Europe use a closed list. That is true: some use it, but on a national rather than a regional system. The system that the Government are inflicting on us is more centralised and more party-controlled than any other system in Europe. It is bad for voters, bad for individual MEPs and bad for democracy in this country. We have said that we will not support it, and we maintain that position. There is a principle at stake, and we will adhere to it.

Mr. George Howarth: We are now debating Lords amendments to the Bill for the fifth time. I believe that the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) has taken part in four of the debates. I must tell him that my affection for him grows in inverse proportion to my comprehension of what he can possibly be talking about.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and his colleagues maintain the pretence that the other place is simply carrying out its proper function as a revising Chamber. Those who continue to advance that argument are either naive—and I venture to suggest that the right hon. Gentleman is not—or disingenuous. The continuing obstruction of the Bill—as Lord Williams of Mostyn made clear yesterday, as did Lord Callaghan: I was at the Bar of the House of Lords, and heard his speech—has gone beyond any legitimate function for a second Chamber. Let us make no mistake: the Lords are now involved in a highly party political game, although I suspect that many of them only dimly perceive it.

Conservative Members—most prominently, both today and in previous debates, the hon. Members for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) and for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed)—would like to create the impression that Labour Members have been dragooned into supporting the Government on the issue. Any Government—the current Government no less than any of our recent predecessors—will defend legislation by using the whipping system, especially when, as in this case, they are delivering a manifesto promise. I make no apology for that.

Conservative Members like to present themselves as a happy band of amiable idealists, motivated simply by sincere constitutional concern. However, they have defended to the last ditch—or perhaps to the next-to-last ditch—the principle of a voting system that could allow the election of a candidate receiving fewer votes than those attracted by the most popular candidate.

In a speech to the House, on 3 March 1845, Disraeli said:

"The Conservative Government has always been an organised hypocrisy."

Now, 150 years later, we know that a Conservative Opposition also can be an organised hypocrisy.

Opposition Front Benchers simply will not admit that many of their own Back Benchers, in both the House and another place, concede privately not only that they are unhappy about events but that they are afraid to voice

[Mr. George Howarth]

those concerns—*[Laughter.]* Conservative Members laugh. Several Conservative Members have conceded privately to me, and to others, that they are afraid of letting the Euro-sceptic genie out of the bottle. That is what they are afraid of.

We are witnessing an organised hypocrisy in sharp focus, combining the forces of the unelected and the unelectable, who are pitting themselves against the House of Commons and the Government, to try to defeat nothing more than a sensible piece of democratic modernisation.

Today, for the fifth time, the House will by an overwhelming majority reject the Lords amendments. I ask the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and other Conservative Members by what right they and the hereditary peers in the other place combine to defy—

Mr. Lansley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howarth: I shall not give way; I was in the middle of a sentence.

By what right do they and hereditary peers combine to defy the will of a democratically elected House of Commons? There is no such right, save their own squalid attempts—for political purposes; they are not issues of great principle—to thwart the Bill and this place.

Mr. Lansley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howarth: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Let us see them for what they truly are: a creaking and pathetic relic of another age. They are fooling no one. On this Bill, Conservative Members have proved themselves to be out of time, out of place and out of office. It is now abundantly clear that they will stay so for a very long time.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 326, Noes 133.

Division No. 379] **[6.53 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fearn, Ronnie
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
Macdonald, Calum

McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Keith Hill and Jane Kennedy.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and Mr. Nigel Waterson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment in lieu of the Lords amendments agreed to.

Northern Ireland Bill (Programme) (No. 2)

7.8 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move,

That the Order [17th July] relating to the Northern Ireland Bill (Programme) be supplemented as follows—

Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion four hours after the commencement of the proceedings.

2.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1.

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question already proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment the Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any further amendment to the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(4) The Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to the Speaker to involve questions of Privilege.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment.

(7) The Speaker shall then put forthwith with respect to the Lords Amendments designated by the Speaker which have not been disposed of the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in those Amendments.

(8) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(9) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, or disposed of an Amendment relevant to a Lords Amendment which has been disagreed to, the Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment which is moved by a Minister of the Crown and relevant to the Lords Amendment.

(10) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

(11) Proceedings under this paragraph shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Supplemental

3. A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting.

4. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on Consideration of the Lords Amendments for any part of the period of four hours after the commencement of the proceedings which falls after Ten o'clock.

I acknowledge that this is an unusual Bill, proceeding to an unusual timetable. However, I believe that the Bill and the manner of its passing reflect the wishes of the majority of hon. Members, although I know that some have grave doubts about the timetable and the Bill—doubts that we all respect. The dilemma that the Government faced before the summer was that, if we were to meet the target of having the Bill ready to come into effect at the end of January, there was no opportunity for extensive consultation before it was introduced. Had we had such consultation, we should not have been able to put the Bill to the House in this Session.

I believe that we were right to introduce the Bill before the summer. The Government have done all that we can to make up for the adverse consequences of the timetable. The main amendments before us reflect our undertaking on Third Reading to reflect and consult further. We took note of points made in debates here before the summer, along with those made in another place since then. We have held the intensive consultations that we promised with the Northern Ireland parties, including the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, which have continued through a long series of meetings, in which I personally have been involved.

We have also had many meetings with others. We have been ready, of course, to meet all interested Members, whether they supported the agreement or opposed it. We have also met the representatives of many outside interests. All the most significant amendments that we propose today have therefore, as I promised the House, been the subject of consultation with the key Northern Ireland parties, including those represented here, and with hon. Members from parties in Great Britain.

I believe that, as a result of our consultations, we have a much better Bill, which is a more faithful reflection of the agreement. We have augmented its provisions substantially in the areas of human rights and equality, and in strands 2 and 3 in particular. There are also, inevitably in so complex a Bill, many technical adjustments, so we have many drafting amendments made in the other place to deal with. The fundamentals of the Bill, however, are unchanged.

Although there are a good many amendments before us, the key ones will be widely familiar among hon. Members who take an interest in Northern Ireland affairs. Members who are interested will also have read closely the reports of debates in another place, and I hope that the note about the amendments that I made available last week may have been of some help to the House.

This Session has been significantly prolonged by the proceedings on the Bill. Both Houses have put themselves out considerably to deal with legislation that is hugely significant in the history of Northern Ireland. We are now at the end of the Session, and time is very limited—and because of our previous business today, we are all aware that there are still other pressing matters, which are also of great concern to hon. Members, to be cleared up.

We therefore believe that it is right to timetable the present stage of the Bill, so as to give the House an opportunity to pronounce on the Lords amendments, but also to permit other business of interest to the House to be properly dealt with.

7.11 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I could not go along with the Minister when he said that everything possible had been done to consult people and give some basis of democracy for the presentation of the Bill. Amazingly, about 450 amendments have been made to it since it left the House in the summer. That must be a record.

Now that we have come here tonight to speak of those matters, it is interesting to see that the First Minister designate and his deputy, although they are both Members of this House, are not even present. The leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party is not here either. That shows that everything has already been decided.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am here.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is here, and he is worth an army—regiments, battalions and all—on his own.

I am simply drawing attention to the fact that everything has already been concluded. We all know that what the Government want will take place no matter what arguments are advanced; it is a foregone conclusion. As a representative from Northern Ireland, I must protest at the way in which the issue has been managed. If the Government had dealt with the future of any other part of the United Kingdom, over such an important matter as devolved government, as they are dealing with the future of Northern Ireland and its people, Members representing other localities would class it as an outrageous insult to be treated in that fashion.

Of course we understand about the timetable, but it is the result of something of which the House should have taken cognisance. Everybody knew that there would be a row about the elections to the European Parliament. I have been a Member of that Parliament, and I would like to have seen how the Labour Members from Strasbourg would have voted here tonight. I have had their ear for the past three months, and they have been telling me how they feel about the way in which things have been going. A row has been brewing.

Why should Northern Ireland suffer because of that? Why should Northern Ireland's representatives not have the opportunity to deal with matters on which we have made representations? The Minister may have had many meetings with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister designate, but he has not had many meetings with the parties. At least, if he has had as many with other parties as he has had with my party, he will not have had to go to too many meetings. There was one discussion on one simple issue, then that was left, and when we came back we had a discussion on other issues.

The Minister wrote to the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), about an "unprecedented and far reaching consultation process".

I do not think that anyone on the Opposition Benches occupied by Members from Northern Ireland tonight would agree with that.

There are many points to which I would like to draw the attention of the House. The issue most commonly discussed in Northern Ireland is the fact that the Prime Minister said that if people were not satisfied, and he was not satisfied, with what was happening, and legislation was introduced, the problems would be dealt with in that legislation.

We all know about the five pledges, the substantial points, that the Prime Minister made. I notice that not one of those has been reinforced. Everybody in Northern Ireland knows that it was because of those promises that the result of the referendum turned out as it did. However, that result was undermined after the elections, in which 28 Unionist Members who opposed the system were elected, and only 28 who voted with the First Minister designate and his deputy. That shows plainly that there was opposition to what was taking place.

There are many issues affecting people in Northern Ireland at the moment. What will the Minister say about the prisoner releases? When we read in the paper that someone sentenced to 1,000 years for multiple murder is out in 16 years, we are alarmed about the future moral situation in our country. Time should have been given for a proper debate on that issue.

What about decommissioning? We have just heard from one of the leaders of Sinn Fein that that will never take place until there is a united Ireland—so it is clear that there will be no movement on that issue.

I have already spoken about the Prime Minister's pledges, but there are many other matters in the Bill that need to be considered. Of course, many amendments have been made to deal with some of the factors, but I must make the point that we are setting in place a system of government that will stay there until the next election. So far as I can see, there can be no change, and the Bill copper-fastens the First Minister and his deputy in place.

We were told that there would be no cherry-picking of the agreement, but anyone who reads the document will notice that there has been not only cherry-picking but the planting of a few more cherry trees that bear a different type of fruit. I see the Minister smiling, because he knows that that is only too true.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us something about the department of the centre? Will it be based on a similar department in Downing street? Has this proved to be so good that the Government have decided that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) need such a system?

The tragedy is that we have an Assembly that is not meeting and is not having Committee meetings. Committees could have been handling cross-border matters, the civic forum and education, but all those have been relegated by the two Ministers to nice little ad hoc Committees at which those who are opposed to the agreement have no say. We believe that those matters should be discussed in the Assembly, but they are not being discussed.

Much was said about the d'Hondt appointment of department chiefs, and it was argued that that was the only way. Why is there to be a departure from the d'Hondt rule when it comes to the appointment of assistant Ministers, or Ministers of State—or whatever they are to be called? It will not matter what the electorate say—the First Minister designate and his deputy will appoint those Ministers. That is a radical departure from the agreement, and it is totally out of order. All appointments will rest on the electoral strength distributed by the d'Hondt method—except junior Ministers. That will bring in the power of patronage, and the First Minister designate and his deputy will have total power.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I must

[Sir Alan Haselhurst]

remind him—as he would wish to keep in order—that we are discussing a programme motion, which does not provide a platform for a mini-Second Reading debate.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am not trying to make a Second Reading speech. I am saying that these matters need to be argued and that we need time to argue them. I have not sat in this House for 30 years without becoming aware of the point that you are making, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am arguing, legitimately, that these matters depart from the agreement and from statements made by the Prime Minister and other Ministers. As those departures have occurred, we should have time to debate them. Therefore, why should we be limited? That is a good argument.

I must mention the matters that concern the people of Northern Ireland, who want their public representatives to have a forum in which they can be discussed. The Assembly is not meeting to discuss the issues, and never had a real discussion on any of them. At the first meeting of the Assembly, a resolution was passed that the two Ministers should have the opportunity to consult on two issues—cross-border matters and the civic forum. Instead, the two Ministers have not produced a report on those matters, but have gone into other areas—including education, where they have made some vivid changes from documents that I have in my possession.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): My hon. Friend told the House that he has been a Member here for 30 years. Can he remember in all that time a worse piece of proposed legislation than this? Is it not a dog's breakfast of a Bill? It brings discredit to the Government, to this House and to the whole democratic p[illegible]

Rev. Ian Paisley: I might have an even more picturesque description of the Bill than a dog's breakfast, but I will not get into that. I agree fully with my hon. Friend. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that you have not called me to order, so you must think that I am now in order. I will now proceed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I, too, have been in the House for a considerable number of years, and the hon. Gentleman and I might agree that there is a narrower focus for a programme motion. I hope that he would accept the narrower interpretation, rather than the wider interpretation on which I thought he was embarked.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am on narrow ground and, unfortunately, it is getting narrower. If the Ministers had had any more time to make more than a dog's breakfast of the Bill, I do not know what we would have called it.

Matters of grave concern to the people of Northern Ireland need to be elucidated and debated, but we will not have time. The amendment paper is nearly as big as the Bill itself. The amendments are presented to us tonight, and we are supposed to nod our heads. However, we will not be nodding our heads. We will use every minute that is given to us by the House for a thorough and proper discussion of the matters.

It would suit me to say, "What is the use?" and to go home, but I am a democrat, and this is the only forum that the elected people of Northern Ireland have at the moment. It is only right that we discuss the matters and bring them to the attention of the House. It may look to others to be a useless exercise but, as democrats, this is what we have been called to do.

I am glad that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, realise that I am in order. I am pleased about that, and I will try to the best of my ability to keep in order.

Human rights matters—which may be of interest to all sections of the House—need to be discussed fully, but there will be very little time to discuss anything at all. I suppose that most people in the House do not even know what this is about—perhaps two or three have some vague idea. We have a mass of amendments from another place, and a mass of amendments passed through the other place which were tabled by the Government.

I believed that we were to get rid of Orders in Council. The House should look at clauses 71 and 72 and ask itself some questions. The Bill is cementing the role of Dublin in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland, and guarantees a place for IRA-Sinn Fein at the very heart of the Government.

We have had an interesting week, in which we have seen the attitude of the Prime Minister to Saddam Hussein. However, terrorists in Northern Ireland—a bit closer to home—tried to kill the whole British Government on one occasion, but a different attitude is being taken to them. The Prime Minister is not saying that it is the Government's business to put those people out of business—it is to put them in government.

The Government may not like it, but we have to discuss and dispute this matter. Therefore, I oppose the guillotine. It is an insult to the people of Northern Ireland to tell their representatives that the debate is to be guillotined and that they will not be given an opportunity to discuss matters that have taken many hours to discuss elsewhere.

7.29 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I must start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, and his colleagues on the degree with which they have listened to representations made to them by hon. Members on both sides of the House and by many parties in Northern Ireland, and for the careful consideration that they have given those representations, some of which appear in the Bill. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that.

The Bill was prepared in considerable haste after the passing of the Good Friday agreement, which meant that many matters had to be fleshed out in another place and we could refer to them only in passing when the Bill was before this House before the recess. I for one acknowledge the progress that has been made and very much welcome it. However, I hope that we will have sufficient time to discuss some matters about which I am still concerned. We are debating the programme motion, and I shall describe the areas on which we should have some sort of debate.

One matter that we should discuss is the limitation that my noble Friend, Lord Williams of Mostyn, put on the powers of the European Commission on Human Rights to have referred to it Westminster legislation concerning matters in Northern Ireland. I could deal with that matter and the arguments that surround it at greater length. It is a matter to which we should pay attention. Secondly,

we should pay attention to the commission's right to subpoena witnesses and to require discovery of documents.

Thirdly, we should consider the most iniquitous matter. I regret having to use such a word, but that is what I feel about what the Government are doing in seeking to get around the Tinnelly case. It is outrageous that people should not know the facts on which their livelihoods and careers are to be jeopardised, and that those should be secret. It is wrong that counsel should be appointed by the accusor—in this case, the Government—but that they should have no responsibility to the applicant or show any care towards them. It is also wrong that people should not be able to have an advocate of their choice to represent them at all times.

In treason cases and cases held in camera, people know the evidence that is being used against them. This Bill would deny people that right. It is certain to cause considerable worry among those at the Bar, and I hope that we will have time to discuss the matter, given the programme laid down. If we do not have time, I have at least made my feelings known on the matter and we could consider it in more detail if we get that far in the Bill.

To return to my starting point, in spite of some of the problems that I still have with the Bill, I recognise that the Government have moved considerably to tidy it up, expand it and do something about the human rights provisions and the various matters to which we drew their attention in conflict, or which were not fully implementing what was contained in the Belfast agreement. We should recognise that fact and welcome it. I think that I am entitled to spend much of my time in the 45 minutes allowed for this brief debate in congratulating the Government and in coming forward to meet them. They have done a great deal, and we applaud them for it.

7.33 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I do not suppose that anyone who heard the Minister introduce the Bill a few moments ago has ever heard someone at the Dispatch Box do so with less enthusiasm and more apologetically, and rightly so.

It is no secret that I am normally coming from a different direction from the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) as regards the Assembly, but on this occasion, I find myself entirely at one with him about the way in which the Bill is being handled.

It is astonishing that a Bill that requires us to consider about 420 amendments, according to my quick count, at this stage could have been brought before the House in the first place. It is all very well for the Minister to say that that is an indication of the extent to which he has listened to representations. The base from which those have had to be made must have been pretty low to require 420 amendments, even when one includes those of a technical nature. Most of us will find that disheartening and frustrating, given our efforts to move the political process forward in Northern Ireland.

How can we possibly consider seriously that number of amendments in four hours, however they are grouped? It is an impossibility, and it shows a disregard for the interests of Northern Ireland.

Last night, when I spoke in the debate on prisoners, I said that it was a pity that the Government had not displayed the same enthusiasm for the implementation of the Stormont agreement as it had displayed for its achievement and putting it in place. I can do no better than repeat that remark this evening and suggest that not only this Government, but the Government of the Irish Republic have shown disregard for the anxiety of the greater number of people in Northern Ireland in the manner in which they have gone about the business of implementing what is, for all of us, a difficult and complex agreement.

The Minister probably knows the pressures facing my local hospital at the moment. I have to return home this evening to my constituency, so I hope that he will accept my apology as I will not be here for his reply. In his response to the points that I and others have made about the time limit set aside for consideration of the Bill at this stage, I hope that he will also find an opportunity to point out to us where we stand as regards the Prime Minister's obligation to the leader of my party on 13 May—I raised this point last night and did not receive a response. The Prime Minister said:

> "Yes—I intend to make it clear that the commitment and the obligations in the agreement must all be fulfilled and that no one can choose to fulfil some part of the agreement and not others."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 365.]

It is a matter of grave disquiet to all of us that it appears that the Government have not been assiduous in ensuring that the Prime Minister's guarantee, which was given to the House at the Dispatch Box, is being honoured as it should be and in the spirit in which it should be.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I appreciate the exigencies that require him to return home, but will he say whether he would have voted against the motion and other measures if he had remained?

Mr. Maginnis: Sometimes I regret giving way to the hon. and learned Gentleman. The sophistry that he brings to the debate is typical of him.

The confidence of people in Northern Ireland—the very people on whom we depend to make the process work—is being undermined by the haphazard way in which the Bill has been presented to the House. My party most certainly cannot concur with the proposal to guillotine debate.

7.40 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I very much welcome the Bill as amended by the other place. The number of amendments reflects the undertakings of the Minister and his colleagues to consult widely in Northern Ireland, among both the political parties and the many other community bodies. I am pleased that he has consulted so widely and so well that the Bill, as amended, will correctly interpret the Good Friday agreement not only in words, but in spirit.

The Bill is not a dog's dinner, but a beano; it is a feast to replace the democratic deficit that has existed in Northern Ireland for many years. The Unionist parties constantly acknowledged that democratic deficit, but now that we have the opportunity to establish the most democratic, most consultative and most all-inclusive Assembly, the Bill is rejected. That is a great pity.

The many amendments, some of them substantive, relate to matters that were signalled to the Minister by the House; the Minister has responded to those concerns over

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

the summer. One or two items require attention, especially the procedures of the Equality Commission and the powers and attributes of the Human Rights Commission. The issue of security certificates is a particular concern for me—the Tinnelly company, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) mentioned, was based in my constituency, and suffered between 1988 and last summer in trying to achieve justice.

So that other hon. Members can participate in and deal with the matters that I mentioned in the main debates, I conclude by once again thanking the Minister and his colleagues for the widespread consultation and for responding to the requests from all the parties in the debates in July. I believe that the concerns that were expressed are faithfully and fully reflected in the amendments that were made in another place.

7.43 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): The Bill is probably the most important piece of constitutional legislation on Northern Ireland for almost 80 years. It is placed before the House this evening with more than 400 amendments—curiously enough, those amendments were made by the other place, that much derided Chamber that people think acts undemocratically. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) has described the Bill as a dog's breakfast, and the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) has called it a beano. The *Beano* is a comic, and the Bill certainly has many comic features.

I want to deal with some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). The Bill is built on the Belfast agreement. That agreement was endorsed in a referendum that was conducted in a manner that would not have met Lord Neill's requirements and would have been declared illegal in the Republic of Ireland, which has its own legislation on such matters. However, the agreement was endorsed largely because it was believed that, as the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) said, pledges given by the Prime Minister would be reflected in the legislation.

None of those pledges has been honoured. People who have committed the most hideous and serious crimes have been released. Promises have been made to the political wings of terror—to parties that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland described as inextricably entwined with terrorism. That includes a party that may be allotted two seats on the Executive under the d'Hondt principles.

The Bill will create allegedly democratic institutions for Northern Ireland by placing on the Executive political representatives of an organisation that declares: "Unless the demands of our political representatives are met, we reserve the right to use political violence to achieve their objectives. We are determined to retain the weaponry that will enable us to do so."

Against that background, it is vital that all aspects of the Bill can be debated in the greatest possible detail. However, we have been allowed only four hours. Given my professional experience in reading legal documents, I have no hesitation in saying—I think that all hon. Members would agree, if they were truly honest with themselves—that it is impossible to have any real discussion or analysis of the amendments in that time.

We should not dismiss the amendments as purely technical, or say that they are only about housekeeping. Many of them are central to the future of democratic and constitutional government in Northern Ireland. They are about the government of two communities and, if they are to be successful, they need to be treated with great sensitivity and wisdom. The fact that they are being dispatched in four hours is a democratic and constitutional disgrace.

In Northern Ireland, we are familiar with being treated as people in no other part of the United Kingdom would be treated. In some of our prisons, it is as though the lunatics have taken over the asylum. A recent report by Her Majesty's inspector of prisons highlighted the totally unacceptable way in which those prisons were organised. The Maze prison was Northern Ireland in microcosm.

The Bill ignores entirely the fact that parties that are to be in government continue to be in charge of organisations that murder and injure people and destroy property. If that is democracy, it is of a very curious kind, but we shall have only four hours to discuss the Bill, and that is an even bigger disfigurement of the democratic process.

7.49 pm

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): I am perplexed by Unionist Members' arguments. We are here to discuss amendments to a Bill that seeks to implement an agreement that was discussed at length and endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland. The question before us is whether the Bill properly implements the agreement.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Surely we are discussing whether the time to debate the matter should be limited. We are not dealing with the matter itself, and the hon. Lady should know that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I think that the hon. Lady will have heard him.

Judy Mallaber: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that the debate is much narrower than was apparent from Unionist Members' contributions.

I have been incredibly impressed by the way in which the Minister has been prepared to listen to everybody and has been extremely patient in considering amendments arising from our previous debates. He has sought to take on board people's views on whether the agreement is properly implemented in the legislation. There has been considerable discussion, and I do not know of anyone who has sought a meeting with him to discuss the amendments who has not been heard. To suggest that there has not been proper discussion of the agreement, the Bill and all the amendments is simply not correct.

The four hours before us are not meant to be a time in which to raise yet again a whole lot of issues that are not in the Bill and not covered in the amendments. The question before us is, narrowly, whether four hours is sufficient time to discuss amendments that have already been considered in great detail.

People on all sides of the argument have had the opportunity to make their views known to the Minister, and I want to place on record my appreciation of the time that has been given to discussing the parts about which I

have been concerned; if my hon. Friend has given so much time to those areas that I know of, I am sure that he must have given considerable time to all the other areas.

We have enough time for a discussion tonight. I am not trying to widen the debate: that was done by some Unionist Members who have tried to introduce a range of subjects that are not relevant to our discussion in the next four hours. I support the motion.

7.52 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I, too, offer my compliments to Ministers.

Representatives of voluntary associations have put the point to me over and over again that the civic forum will need to be given adequate resources if it is not to become a talking shop—

It being three quarters of an hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to the Order [17 July].*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 6.

Division No. 380] **[7.53 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Aingar, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dafis, Cynog
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fearn, Ronnie
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian

Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Hanson and
Mr. David Clelland.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford
Hunter, Andrew
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Maginnis, Ken
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Rev. Ian Paisley and
Mr. William Ross.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the Order [17th July] relating to the Northern Ireland Bill (Programme) be supplemented as follows—

Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion four hours after the commencement of the proceedings.

2.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1.

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question already proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment the Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any further amendment to the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(4) The Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to the Speaker to involve questions of Privilege.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment.

(7) The Speaker shall then put forthwith with respect to the Lords Amendments designated by the Speaker which have not been disposed of the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in those Amendments.

(8) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(9) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, or disposed of an Amendment relevant to a Lords Amendment which has been disagreed to, the Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment which is moved by a Minister of the Crown and relevant to the Lords Amendment.

(10) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

(11) Proceedings under this paragraph shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Supplemental

3. A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting.

4. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on Consideration of the Lords Amendments for any part of the period of four hours after the commencement of the proceedings which falls after Ten o'clock.

Northern Ireland Bill *[Money]* (No. 2)

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

8.4 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Northern Ireland Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by the Lord Chancellor under the Act.

The second money resolution is required as a result of changes made to the Bill since it left the House that make the Lord Chancellor liable to incur certain expenditure. The Lord Chancellor was not covered by the original money resolution made when the Bill was first introduced here.

Expenditure may be incurred in two discrete areas, the first of which relates to the tribunal which will be set up under the Bill to consider appeals against national security certificates. Provision has been made in amendment No. 348 for the payment of remuneration, allowances, pensions and gratuities to members of the tribunal, and compensation to former members in special circumstances. The amendment also provides for the payment of remuneration and expenses to the tribunal's staff and others employed by the tribunal. We shall have an opportunity to discuss the amendment later.

Provision has been made in Lords amendment No. 347 for the second area of expenditure, which is the payment of the legal fees that may be incurred by a defendant in criminal proceedings in which a devolution issue arises and for which he is granted legal aid. The additions to the cost of the Bill are both modest and necessary, and I hope that the House will support the resolution.

8.5 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): My hon. Friend the Minister has given no indication of the actual cost that is likely to be incurred in respect of the tribunal. I should be grateful if he did so.

I also ask him to consider whether we want to finance an organisation where the applicant will not see the evidence on which a decision about his future has been based; the tribunal can sit in secret and neither he nor his legal representative will be present. A barrister may be appointed from the Northern Ireland Bar to represent him, but that barrister will have no duty of care whatsoever to the person whom he is supposed to represent, and will have limitations placed on what information he may or may not give to the person whom he is supposed to represent; and if the certificate is upheld, it shall be conclusive proof of everything it contains.

Do we in this House really want to vote money for such a tribunal? I should have thought it a matter about which Members of Parliament who are also members of the legal profession would be somewhat concerned. It would appear that certain members of the Northern Ireland Bar—those who are regarded as the good, the just and the perfect—will be put on a separate panel, from which the Attorney-General will choose people to represent applicants; whereas others will not, and even though they are representing a client they will not be allowed to sit in on the tribunal.

8.7 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Will the Minister tell us something about those former members of the tribunal to whom he referred?

8.8 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Will the Minister tell us whether the Government have calculated the cost of the component parts of the legislation? For example, what do they envisage will be the likely cost of the north-south bodies, the implementation bodies and the British-Irish Council? Do they think it sensible to have junior Ministers at additional cost, when the Bill already allows for up to 10 Ministers to deal with the existing six Departments in Northern Ireland? Those appear to be matters of expenditure which, had the Government been left to deal with Northern Ireland on their own, they would have told us were not sensible or prudent.

If the Minister has quantified the expenditure in each of those areas, can he justify it?

8.9 pm

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) made a point about the principle behind the tribunal and I hope that we will have the opportunity to discuss that important matter in greater detail. I know that he is especially concerned. He asked specifically about the costs of the tribunal, but those are hard to establish because they will be driven by the number of cases that the tribunal handles every year. We anticipate two cases per year, at an average cost of £11,500. I said that the costs are likely to be modest, but they will be determined by events. Like everything else that the Government do, we have to make our best assessment; if there are more cases, they will have to be funded.

Mr. McNamara: Did my hon. Friend give an estimate of £11,500 for two cases, which would be £5,750 a case? I may have misheard him.

Mr. Ingram: I said that the cost had been estimated at £11,500 per case, but if I have misled my hon. Friend I am sorry. The cost will be driven by the number of cases, and it may escalate or it may be zero, if there are no cases.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) raised the question of former members of the tribunal. Our proposals are modelled on the approach to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, and the order allows contributions to be made to pensions. That will give us flexibility to deal with special circumstances, but those costs are also likely to be modest.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) raised issues outwith the terms of the order. I do not know whether he was at the Assembly meeting last week, when my hon. Friend the Minister of State presented the budget. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but it was an important meeting, and it is a matter of regret that he did not hear the full explanation given by my hon. Friend of the budget and the costs that will devolve to the new Assembly.

Indications were given in the report to the Assembly of the costs that would fall on it as a consequence of some of the new bodies that will arise from the agreement. Costs relating to the British-Irish Council will be met by the two Governments, but they will be modest, given the frequency and length of the meetings. Those costs are a necessary component of meeting the Government's obligations under the agreement.

Question put and agreed to.

Northern Ireland Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 4

TRANSFERRED, EXCEPTED AND RESERVED MATTERS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, leave out lines 4 to 7 and insert—

(""excepted matter" means any matter falling within a description specified in Schedule 2;

"reserved matter" means any matter falling within a description specified in Schedule 3;

"transferred matter" means any matter which is not an excepted or reserved matter.")

8.13 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 56 and 222 to 270.

Mr. Murphy: Without touching on the time allowed for the amendments, which was properly dealt with in a previous debate, I wish to touch on the nature of the amendments that the House will consider in the next few hours. Most of them are drafting or technical amendments, and I shall refer to them in detail shortly.

We will deal with three types of amendment tonight. Some are essentially technical. It was necessary that the other place dealt with the changes because the Bill was drawn up in haste. Indeed, I pay tribute to the parliamentary draftsmen and to all those involved in drawing up the legislation in such a short time.

The Bill was designed to enact an agreement and, inevitably, detailed, technical amendments were necessary because it was drafted in such a short time. Amendments came before the House and the other place earlier in the Bill's progress and hon. Members who were present for those debates will recall that my ministerial colleagues and I said that they would be necessary. This Session has lasted as long as it has because of the nature of that parliamentary process and the significance that the House of Commons attaches to the agreement.

The second type of amendments relate specifically to the points made during the Bill's passage through Parliament. Members on both sides of the House withdrew amendments on the basis that the Secretary of State and my ministerial colleagues and I would think again. We reflected on the points that had been made, and then Lord Dubs introduced amendments in the other place. Many of the amendments therefore result from representations made to the Government by hon. Members and others.

The third type of amendments arise as a direct result of consultation. Some thought that the consultation was not adequate, and others have kindly said that they thought it was. One cannot satisfy all the people all the time, but hon. Members will understand that my door was always open; and if any hon. Members wished to discuss with me any issue arising from the Bill, they were able to do so. Many meetings were held with parties, hon. Members and others who expressed an interest in the Bill. In 11 years in the House, I have never experienced a similar level of consultation. Indeed, although we had consultation over the Scottish and Welsh legislation, it was not the same as on the Bill for Northern Ireland, because it enacts the agreement.

In the end, the Government had to decide on the form that the amendments would take, and we have sometimes pleased some people and sometimes displeased them. If there was no clear sign in the agreement, we had to try to work out whether we could have obtained a consensus on a particular issue had the talks continued. That was sometimes difficult to discover. In many cases, and sometimes on controversial issues, there was unanimity, and I shall list those cases as I go through the amendments before us. I shall tell the House on which amendments every party in Northern Ireland that wished to consult with me agreed. Sometimes, some parties disagreed, but that was not always the case—it is important to put that on record because of the large number of amendments. I sat for several years on the shadow Front Bench, and I should have been the first to exactly the opposite if I had thought that that was not so. We are reflecting concerns as far as we can.

Amendment No. 1 is a drafting amendment, which makes it clear that any matters may be transferred out of schedule 3, which lists reserved matters, that fall within the description given there. Amendment No. 56 creates a new clause out of the old clause 20(4)(b), the drafting of which was defective. Amendments Nos. 222 to 270 bear on schedules 2 and 3. We have had to do some tidying up of those schedules, and a number of the amendments are purely drafting or technical points, or are designed to clarify matters that were perhaps open to uncertainty.

Other amendments add new matters to the schedules, including new subjects such as the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, the Parades Commission for Northern Ireland and "assisted areas" under the Industrial Development Act 1982. In other cases, we have had to bring some descriptions up to date, including those of international relations, broadcasting and telecommunications, including the internet. In one or two other cases, it has made sense to move matters from one category into another. For example, we thought it right to move the regulation of activities in outer space from the reserved to the excepted category. That was not, of course, a matter much discussed in the agreement or at the talks.

Amendments Nos. 242 and 270 rationalise the way in which the provisions of the Bill are safeguarded against modification by the Assembly. Most of the amendments are technical.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I agree with the Minister, and I congratulate him on the extraordinary degree of consultation that has taken place. I am not able to speak for other parties, but the Liberal Democrats thank the Government for being genuinely willing to listen. More to the point, they were willing to act on at least some of the concerns that we raised, and that is a testament to the Minister's genuine willingness to achieve results. All parties will accept that he spent most of his summer, as he said he would, listening, and responding accordingly.

We still have concerns about some amendments. My intention is to highlight only a small number of them this evening. The Bill has been substantially debated,

both here and in the other place. I do not share the concerns expressed by some hon. Members that there is not enough time for debate tonight. That is one reason why we supported the Government earlier.

I shall mention only one amendment in this group. The Minister has already mentioned it, and it may seem a little crazy of me to bring it up again. Amendment No. 241, as he rightly said, makes regulation of activities in outer space an excepted matter. One may think that uncontroversial, but I should highlight the fact that, believe it or not, Armagh observatory has played an increasingly important part in some space research, specifically on the asteroid threat—the impact of a heavenly body on the earth, which could cause catastrophic damage, and which could wipe out a vast proportion of the human race. It may seem insane to raise concern about that, and I do not expect the Minister to alter the Bill at this late stage, but advances in technology may make it possible for the Northern Ireland Assembly seriously to consider matters relating to outer space in 30 or 50 years' time. The Armagh observatory may then be actively involved in such activities.

I raise the matter only because Armagh observatory plays such a prominent role through experts such as Mr. Chambers, Bill Napier and others. I merely want to put the matter on record so that it may be read in the future when this concern is more prelevant. Perhaps Armagh observatory will thus be able to play its part in what will become an increasingly important scientific endeavour.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I want to ask a question about amendment No. 240, which refers to

"regulation of sea fishing outside the Northern Ireland zone (except in relation to Northern Ireland fishing boats)",

which are defined in the way we would expect them to be. May I plead for parity of esteem among the fishing industries of Northern Ireland, Scotland and England?

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): And the Isle of Man.

Dr. Godman: As my hon. Friend says, the Isle of Man should be included, too. The Minister knows that the Northern Ireland fishing industry—specifically the catching sector—is much smaller than the Scottish industry. I seek an assurance that fishing communities in Northern Ireland will enjoy parity of esteem with Scottish, English and Welsh communities when negotiations take place in Brussels and in London on total allowable catches and other such matters. My hon. Friend may wish to write to me, but I seek an assurance in principle for now.

Mr. Paul Murphy: If my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) is patient, he will hear me speak about the fishing industry under the next group of amendments. I hope that I shall not have to write to him.

I am grateful for the comments by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik). I, too, have visited Armagh observatory. It was the first observatory I had been to, and it was an extremely valuable visit. The observatory is a great educational asset for Northern Ireland. Activities in outer space have been moved from the reserved to the excepted category because that is the case in Scotland. Amendment No. 241 refers to launching into space, so that it would be possible, eventually, for Northern Ireland—and Scotland for that matter—to take part in such activities.

Putting on for a moment my other hat, as a Finance Minister, I should add that I have not set aside any money for such activities in the forthcoming financial year.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 5

ACTS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 2, line 41, after ("6") insert (", (*Entrenched enactments*)")

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 24, 26 and 271.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments provide a group of miscellaneous changes to part II of the Bill, which concerns legislative powers. They are, again, mostly of technical or drafting significance. I draw attention to two sets of amendments, both of which are based on the Scotland Bill. There are provisions, starting with amendment No. 11, to permit the Northern Ireland Assembly to regulate fishing in a Northern Ireland zone, and to allow it jurisdiction over Northern Ireland-licensed boats beyond that, which is the matter to which my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) referred earlier.

Amendment No. 11 relates to clause 6, and provides that

"Her Majesty may by Order in Council"—

subject to affirmative resolution at Westminster—

"specify functions which are to be treated . . . as . . . exercisable in or as regards Northern Ireland."

That is one of several amendments throughout the Bill to permit the Northern Ireland authorities to regulate fishing in a Northern Ireland zone. The designation of the zone is provided for under amendment No. 219, and the Northern Ireland authorities could be given power as respects Northern Ireland-licensed boats, even outside the zone. The amendments parallel arrangements in the Scotland Bill.

There is also a procedure by which the Assembly can reconsider a Bill that has been referred to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council under clause 10, and which the Committee has then referred to the European Court.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 24 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 25, in page 6, line 26, leave out from ("contains") to end of line 27 and insert

("a provision which he considers—

(a) would be incompatible with any international obligations, with the interests of defence or national security or with the protection of public safety or public order; or

(b) would have an adverse effect on the operation of the single market in goods and services within the United Kingdom.").

8.30 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 57 to 61.

Mr. Ingram: The amendments have two purposes: first, to ensure that the interests of defence, national security, public order and public safety are properly safeguarded under the new devolved arrangements in Northern Ireland and, secondly, to protect the operation of the single market in goods and services across the United Kingdom.

Amendment No. 25 provides that the Secretary of State may decline to submit an Assembly Bill for Royal Assent if she considers it to be incompatible with any international obligations, the interests of defence or national security, the protection of public safety or public order, or with the operation of the UK single market. Amendment No. 60 is closely related, and gives the Secretary of State power to revoke subordinate legislation for the same reasons.

Hon. Members will want to be aware that the Scotland Bill also contains provisions for ensuring that legislation meets international obligations and safeguards national security, so the amendments make the Bill compatible with the Scotland Bill, although the provisions are not directly equivalent.

It is worth while outlining the important principle of the single market in goods and services across the United Kingdom. Under European Community law, the Assembly and Northern Ireland Ministers will be required to meet obligations under EC single market legislation in transferred areas; that will include not discriminating against goods and services from any other member state of the European Union.

Community legislation enforces a single market between EU member states, but not necessarily within each member state. The amendments seek to fill that gap, since it is only right that goods and services from England, Wales and Scotland should be treated no less favourably than those from other EU member states.

Amendments Nos. 57 and 58 deal with the Secretary of State's power to direct that certain action be taken by Ministers or Departments or to direct that proposed action is not taken. When the Bill left the House previously, clause 20 enabled the Secretary of State to exercise that power only to comply with international obligations. The amendments extend that responsibility so that the interests of defence, national security, public order and public safety are also protected.

The Government consider the amendments to be important and necessary. It is a vital responsibility of Government to safeguard the interests of defence and national security and to protect public order and public safety. That responsibility extends throughout the United Kingdom and will continue to do so after devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The amendments ensure that the Secretary of State has a means of continuing to discharge her responsibilities in respect of those matters after devolution.

Although I of course hope that no situation would ever arise in which the interests of defence, national security, public order or public safety were in danger of being compromised, the nature of the subjects is such that it would be entirely inappropriate even to leave open that possibility. The consequences are potentially too serious. The amendments would allow the Secretary of State to act speedily if an urgent issue were to arise.

Clearly, it is not possible to describe all the circumstances in which such an issue may arise. Many areas to be governed by Assembly legislation will need to contain ancillary provisions on national security. For example, orders as diverse as the Litter Order 1993, the Food Safety Order 1991 and the Electricity Order 1991 have included provisions such as an override of the powers of entry to protect sensitive areas. We need to ensure that proper provisions continue to be made in that wide-ranging field.

I emphasise to the House that those provisions, by their very nature, will be used by the Government only as a last resort. If an issue were to arise which caused concern, every effort would be made to resolve it through consultation with the Northern Ireland Administration. If, and only if, that were not possible would the Secretary of State use that power of direction. Nevertheless, for the reasons that I have outlined, it is important that such a power is available. I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 26 agreed to.

Clause 14

FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Lords amendment: No. 27, in page 7, line 18, leave out from ("within") to ("elect") in line 19 and insert

("a period of six weeks beginning with its first meeting,").

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 28 to 32.

Mr. Ingram: I shall deal with the amendments slightly out of order and speak first to amendments Nos. 29 and 30, which deal with concerns raised during earlier stages of the House's consideration of the Bill about the impact of a vacancy in the First Minister and Deputy First Minister posts.

As the Bill stood, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister needed to make decisions jointly. If one ceased to hold office, the other automatically did so too. That would then be followed by a new election for First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

That was considered during the proceedings on the Bill and concerns were raised by a number of Members, including the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman), whom I am pleased to see here this evening. He has followed the Bill through its many stages. Those Members suggested that the Bill could give rise to a vacuum at the centre of the devolved Government. The First Minister and Deputy

First Minister play an important role, and it would be awkward if the posts were vacant at a time when joint decisions were needed.

The new provisions prevent such a vacuum from occurring by enabling the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to appoint alternates from among the Northern Ireland Ministers to exercise functions during their absence through illness or incapacity or during a vacancy.

Under the amendments, if either the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister post fell vacant, the other would too, but the alternate and the remaining postholder would continue to exercise the functions of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister acting jointly in a caretaker capacity until a fresh election had been held. In the event of absence or incapacity, the amendments provide that the alternate would not be able to exercise the functions of the First Minister or Deputy First Minister for a period exceeding six weeks. That time would be used to deal with any concerns raised.

Amendments Nos. 27, 28, 31 and 32 clarify the Bill's provisions, making it clear that the Assembly is to elect a new First Minister and Deputy First Minister within six weeks of its first meeting or, in the case of a mid-term election, within six weeks of the vacancy. I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 28 to 32 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 33, after clause 14, to insert the following new clause—*Ministerial offices*—

".—(1) The First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly may at any time, and shall where subsection (2) applies, determine—

(a) the number of Ministerial offices to be held by Northern Ireland Ministers; and

(b) the functions to be exercisable by the holder of each such office.

(2) This subsection applies where provision is made by an Act of the Assembly for establishing a new Northern Ireland department or dissolving an existing one.

(3) In making a determination under subsection (1), the First Minister and the deputy First Minister shall ensure that the functions exercisable by those in charge of the different Northern Ireland departments existing at the date of the determination are exercisable by the holders of different Ministerial offices.

(4) The number of Ministerial offices shall not exceed 10 or such greater number as the Secretary of State may by order provide.

(5) A determination under subsection (1) shall not have effect unless it is approved by a resolution of the Assembly passed with cross-community support."

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 34 to 44 and 373.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments deal with a technical but extremely important part of the Bill—the workings of the d'Hondt formula for appointing Ministers. I had never heard of d'Hondt until I went into the talks process, but we hear of nothing else nowadays. As hon. Members know, d'Hondt refers to the system by which members of the Executive—the Ministers for Northern Ireland—will eventually be appointed. Essentially, they will be appointed on the basis of the electoral strength of their party as a consequence of the Assembly elections.

Many of the amendments that we are considering in this regard reflect points made during previous consideration in Committee and in the House on Report. Other amendments are technical, reflecting the complexity of the subject matter. As I said on Report and Third Reading, the provisions on the circumstances in which the d'Hondt formula should be re-run needed amendment in order to reflect the spirit of the agreement fully.

Amendment No. 33 sets out the circumstances in which the First Minister and Deputy First Minister may make a determination, as it is called, setting out the number of ministerial posts, and the functions exercisable by the holders of those posts. Those determinations need to be approved by the Assembly on a cross-community basis.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister will be able to introduce determinations when they choose, but they must do so if legislation has been passed creating or dissolving a Northern Ireland department, as it would clearly be wrong to create a new department without ensuring that it had a Minister in charge of it.

In addition to new determinations to reflect what we might call the machinery of government changes, the Bill also needs provision for the d'Hondt formula to be rerun within the existing framework of departmental responsibility—a matter that was of great interest to hon. Members in Committee.

The series of amendments to clause 15, and in particular amendment No. 34, concern the circumstances in which the formula would be re-run. As hon. Members will know by now, the d'Hondt formula is a means of allocating posts proportionally. The formula will obviously therefore need to be re-run after every Assembly election to take account of new electoral mandates. In addition, amendment No. 34 provides for re-runs in other circumstances—for example, when a party is excluded from office, leaving its seats vacant, or when a party's period of exclusion comes to an end and its entitlement to hold office has to be accommodated.

The Assembly will also be able to set out in its Standing Orders other circumstances when d'Hondt could be re-run. It is for the Members of the Assembly to determine what those circumstances will be. I understand that the Standing Orders Committee of the Assembly is examining the issues and will continue to do so.

The other amendments deal with technical issues, such as what happens when a party declines to provide a nominee for a post to which it is entitled, a definition of a registered political party and a provision that nominating officers may delegate their powers only to officers of their party who are also members of the Assembly.

Amendments Nos. 37 and 38 are particularly loved, I guess, by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), who referred to an anorak when he spoke about them previously, as only he understood the algebraic formulas. I now refer to S and how to define it. It is the figure in the d'Hondt formula reflecting the number of seats that the party has in the Assembly.

The revised definition—I am delighted that we do not have to deal with this in the Welsh Assembly—defines S as the number of seats that a party held at the first meeting of the Assembly. We believe that it is right in

[Mr. Murphy]

determining party representation in the Executive Committee to base the calculation on the electoral mandate that the party received in the Assembly election.

Amendment No. 373 is a transitional provision, and ensures that any determination on the number of ministerial posts made during the shadow phase carries forward after devolution.

The reason for the d'Hondt formula, and for S and the algebra, is important. The purpose is to ensure confidence across the community in Northern Ireland, so that people know that their parties will, if they receive a sufficient mandate in the election, have the opportunity for their Members to become Ministers and play their part in the Executive Committee. The referendum was successful for that reason. The formula gives both sides of the community—and others who believe that they do not belong to either of the traditional communities—the opportunity to play their part in the government of Northern Ireland.

As I see the Assembly working, I believe that the overwhelming number of its Members—whatever party they represent—have the interests of their constituents at heart. When those Members must eventually decide their priorities, budgets and policies on hospitals, roads and so on, we will be in a position to say—hand on heart—that the system is satisfactory across the political and religious divide. That is why we chose the d'Hondt formula, that is why the people voted for it, and that is why I commend the amendments to the House.

8.45 pm

Mr. Öpik: I thank the Minister for bringing my long and lonely vigil in defence of proportional representation to a very happy end. I gave the impression of understanding what I was talking about in July—my thanks to others who have been concerned about this issue. It was a good example of intensive and considerable representations leading to a favourable outcome. I suppose that, instead of wearing the anorak of a defender of proportional representation, I now wear the mantle of respectability.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): With knee breeches, tights and silver-buckle shoes.

Mr. Öpik: Perhaps the other place could learn from my experience.

It will be most important to observe the system functioning in the years ahead and to ensure that it works. Once again, I thank the Minister and his staff for listening carefully to our concerns.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): When I raised this issue during earlier debate on the Bill, I asked the Minister whether he would reconsider and include in the legislation a specific requirement to re-run the formula when party numbers changed within the Assembly to such an extent that they impacted on the number of Ministers, chairmen or vice-chairmen from a particular party. Rather than assisting us in that matter, the Minister has done the reverse: he has enshrined in even more definite terms the requirement that the original formula should stand.

That is nonsense, and the Minister has sown the seeds of the Assembly's destruction. I invite him to consider circumstances in which Assembly Members change party in such significant numbers that it affects the number of ministerial and other Assembly posts to which that party is entitled. Under the Bill as framed, that party would not be able to gain the additional posts to which it would be entitled numerically. At that stage, the Executive would not have the power to vote through their own legislation against parties that had been badly done by in those circumstances. A party deprived of ministerial posts because of the insistence on this formula could hold the entire Assembly to ransom and, because of the cross-community rule, prevent decisions from being taken.

The Minister has made this short-sighted determination for only one political purpose. He knows that the most likely movement within the Assembly would be away from the Ulster Unionist party faction led by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

The Minister knows that his agreement would flounder in circumstances in which the right hon. Member for Upper Bann lost numerical strength in the Assembly. Therefore, without any democratic support in the Assembly, the Minister hopes that he can allow the right hon. Gentleman to hold on to office, but he does that only through trickery in the Bill, not through a democratic vote in the Assembly. It is altogether wrong that the Minister takes that course.

It is too late to urge the Minister to think again, because he has taken the matter on an entirely political basis. I entirely oppose what he has done—it is undemocratic. There is no need for any hon. Member to rejoice and think that the Minister is upholding democratic principles. He is not; he is ensuring that, whatever the results at an election, no change will take place in the Assembly thereafter, no matter how much people depart from their manifesto commitments.

The Minister has done a disservice to the House by supporting the amendment and by insisting that the democratic will of the Assembly would be defied in such circumstances. Voting against the amendment would have no impact, other than to reduce the time available for us to speak under this tight schedule. I oppose the measure, but will not be voting on the issue, simply because of time.

Mr. McGrady: Does the Minister agree that the formula enshrined in the amendment copper-fastens in statute the will of the people, as distinct from the will and the manipulative processes of political parties within the Assembly? Does he also agree that the result of the elections to the Assembly is the will of the people embodied and expressed in the number of seats gained by each party? Surely that is the most democratic expression of what the people want and the way in which the Bill allows for the allocation of ministerial seats by the d'Hondt principle.

It is not appropriate for the Bill to provide for the manipulations of parties that are trying to pressurise elected Members to move from one block to another for the purpose of frustrating the agreement, the election and the will of the people.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Minister had never heard of d'Hondt. All I can tell him is that he should have a look

at that Assembly in Strasbourg; he would know perfectly well that such things happen all the time under the d'Hondt system.

Members of the Minister's party have been removed from office and from Committees because of changes in the alignment of Members of the European Parliament. That goes on all the time under the d'Hondt system. It is nonsense for the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) to tell us that that would be a terrible thing, because the d'Hondt system in the European Parliament works in exactly that way. There are all sorts of changes: people from other countries suddenly say that they are no longer affiliated to a certain political grouping, resign and join another grouping. If there are enough resignations, all the chairmanships of every Committee of the European Parliament have to change accordingly.

The European Parliament is always being pointed to as something to be admired, followed and looked up to. The Labour party is dropping a lot of people for the next election, and it will have a lot of other people elected, so it has wide experience of this. The Minister argues that we should adopt the d'Hondt principle, but then he copper-fastens an election for four years. A lot can happen in four years; if such changes happened in this House, the hon. Member for South Down would not say that this House was undemocratic. If they happened in the Dail—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would carry a flag for the democracy of the Dail—it would be all right; and it has happened in the Dail.

I remember a member of Fine Gael who suddenly discovered that he was going to be a member of Fianna Fáil, and it changed the whole Government. Of course, he got a good payment, because he was made a Commissioner for Europe and got a grand handshake twice of £60,000, so it was a good deal, but such changes happen under the d'Hondt system, and the House should be aware of it.

I noticed that the Minister shook his head when my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) talked about the measure sowing the seeds of the destruction of the Assembly. Say, for example, that 28 Unionists disagree with what is happening: technically, they line up behind the First Minister designate. Among them, about eight or nine are completely unhappy. When it comes to a cross-community vote and they vote under the cross-community system, there is no cross-community consensus. Under the rule that the Minister is introducing, the only way out of that difficulty—we have discussed it in Committee—is to have an election.

Will that lead to the stability of Northern Ireland? Why can the d'Hondt principle not be followed through, as it is in Europe? The European Parliament runs for its full term. Those who are members of that Parliament have the happy knowledge of when there is going to be another election; it is not like here, where we do not know when the election will be. Why cannot that system be followed?

Therefore, to say that the measure will remedy the position is incorrect. If the situation is as the Minister wants to have it, when it comes to the division, we are going to have an election, and, after the election, the seats will be allocated in keeping with the d'Hondt principle; so what is the use of trying to put off the evil day if there is a rigid divide in the Assembly?

Say, for example—not that it is likely—that a section of the Social Democratic and Labour party joined Sinn Fein. What would happen then? It may be possible, although I do not think that it is likely; I know that the hon. Member for South Down will not be joining Sinn Fein. However, what I am saying is that that could happen. Therefore, it would far better to follow the d'Hondt principle clearly through the whole system.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): One of the difficulties faced by the consensual arrangement under the agreement for allegedly creating democratic institutions in Northern Ireland is the absence of an effective opposition. Everyone except several minor parties that will never, by their votes, be able to change anything, will be in the Government, and they will be in the Government on the application of the d'Hondt principles.

Therefore, one of the weaknesses of the entire system that has been set up under the Bill and under the agreement is the inability of parties or people to change anything within the period, or the initial period, of the Assembly's lifetime. Everyone will be in government, so, effectively, the Government will at no time be the subject of criticism.

Many people say that that is the difficulty that one has to suffer to provide some institutions that will be generally accepted on a cross-community basis, but that is no reason why one should set in stone provisions that effectively prevent the dangers of those institutions from being ameliorated.

For example, at present the Unionist side contains 28 Ulster Unionists and two members of the Progressive Unionist party who are genuinely in favour of the agreement. There are 28 members of the Assembly—20 in the Democratic Unionist party, five in the UK Unionist party and three in the United Unionist party. Thus, when a crucial issue arises, there will be two groups, one with 30 votes and one with 28.

9 pm

One of the issues that may lead to a serious realignment of that grouping is decommissioning. The way in which the First Minister deals with decommissioning could cause a substantial number of members of his party to join the 28 who are saying no. Under these proposals, however, because the First Minister had 28 members to start with, he would probably be entitled to three Ministries. Even if, as a result of some change within his party, he finished up with 10 members of his party who were willing to support him, he would still, apparently, be able to continue with three Ministers.

That is a ludicrous situation, which should not be permitted, but, if the assignment of Ministries, under the d'Hondt arrangements, is pinned for all time to the number of members elected to the party concerned at the date of the election, it is effectively what will happen. Such arrangements will prevent anyone being able to change the number of representatives as Ministers in the Executive, because they will be pinned to a certain point in time—the date of the election.

In such circumstances, the absence of flexibility may even bring about what many people, perhaps the majority, would not want: the collapse of the Assembly. If a minority party has three Ministers, and a group with

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40 or 50 members only two Ministers, difficulties will arise. That would be such an insult to the democratic process as to be patently unworkable.

In the interests not of defeating the Assembly but of giving it a flexibility that will reflect the basic demands of democracy, and perhaps preserving it, I ask Ministers to think again about placing in tablets of stone the entitlement of Members of the Assembly under the d'Hondt principles, and pinning that entitlement to events at the date of the election, which may not, at the relevant time, reflect what Assembly members—or a majority group of them—would want.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) and to my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) for their support on some of the issues that we are discussing. Let me make a few points about what was said by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) and the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley).

I do not think that I am sowing the seeds of destruction of the Assembly. That is far from my mind. The hon. Member for Belfast, East referred to "my" agreement. It is not my agreement; it is the people's agreement. They voted for it in the referendum. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the idea of rerunning d'Hondt during a period when the Assembly was in office. He raised the issue in the House, as did his colleagues, during consultation. However, the other parties in Northern Ireland did not share his view. He is probably not surprised about that—it is politics.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East said that I was taking a political decision. However, the other place took a decision on this group of Lords amendments, and the House will take a decision on it. As a consequence of our consultation, we tell the House that we believe that the best course of action is that d'Hondt should be re-run only in the circumstances to which I have referred. The Assembly itself, using its own standing orders, can determine the precise basis of any other circumstances.

I think that people in Northern Ireland will understand full well when they vote for parties that—because of the system in which we are currently engaged in Northern Ireland, under d'Hondt—ministerial responsibilities will be established in accordance with the electoral mandate. That is a very straightforward point.

The hon. Member for North Antrim made comparisons with Europe. As I have been investigating d'Hondt, I have been interested in how other legislatures, particularly in Europe, have dealt with it. There are, of course, differences. We are dealing with d'Hondt in the context of an entirely new political agreement, and of all the other aspects that such an agreement entails. The situation in Europe is very different. Although the system is the same, it is operating within a different context.

I think that the Government have taken the right decision, and I hope that the House agrees with us. The other place has agreed with us. I sincerely hope that the public will understand our reasons. I have no doubt that some hon. Members will not agree with me, but they will be able to make their points forcefully in the Assembly itself when it considers the matters.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 34 to 44 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 45, after clause 15, to insert the following new clause—*Junior Ministers*—

".—(1) The First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly may at any time determine—

(a) that a number of members of the Assembly specified in the determination shall be appointed as junior Ministers in accordance with such procedures for their appointment as are so specified; and

(b) that the functions exercisable by virtue of each junior Ministerial office shall be those specified in relation to that office in the determination.

(2) Procedures specified in a determination under this section may apply such formulae or other rules as the First Minister and the deputy First Minister consider appropriate.

(3) A determination under this section shall—

(a) make provision as to the circumstances in which a junior Minister shall cease to hold office, and for the filling of vacancies; and

(b) provide that a junior Minister shall not take up office until he has affirmed the terms of the pledge of office.

(4) A determination under this section shall not take effect until it has been approved by a resolution of the Assembly.

(5) Where a determination under this section takes effect—

(a) any junior Ministers previously appointed shall cease to hold office; and

(b) the procedures specified in the determination shall be applied within a period specified in standing orders."

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 72, 75, 76, 78, 80, 82, 98, 364 and 374.

Mr. Murphy: I suspect that there may be some disagreement in the House on this group of amendments too, but we shall see what hon. Members have to say about it. We discussed the issue of junior Ministers with every party in Northern Ireland, and it has been debated in the other place. When we debated the Bill before the summer recess, we touched on the issue. Unfortunately, the talks process did not get around to talking and dealing in depth with the issue. Consequently, the agreement is effectively silent on junior Ministers.

The new clause and consequential amendments would enable the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Assembly to decide to have junior Ministers in addition to the junior Northern Ireland Ministers provided for in the Bill. As I said, there is nothing in the agreement about junior Ministers, although they are provided for in Scotland, were a feature of previous devolved government in Northern Ireland, and are, of course, a feature at Westminster.

In subsequent meetings with the parties, there has been some strong support for some provision in the Bill for the appointment of junior Ministers. There has been no disagreement on the principle, although there has been disagreement on the methods by which they are to be appointed.

Accordingly, the new clause provides for the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, acting jointly, to make a determination that may cover the number, functions and methods of appointment of junior Ministers—who, of course, must be Members of the Assembly. Such a joint determination would not take effect—this is very important—until it has been approved by a resolution of the Assembly itself.

The other amendments in the group are consequential. They would subject junior Ministers to clause 23's provisions on exclusion from office. They provide that junior Ministers, like Northern Ireland Ministers, cannot serve as Chairmen or Deputy Chairmen of Committees. Last, but not least, the amendment to clause 38 would enable junior Ministers to be paid extra.

Amendment No. 364 subjects junior Ministers, as well as Northern Ireland Ministers, to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act. Amendment No. 374 is a transitional amendment, providing that any determination on junior Ministers during the shadow period is carried forward after devolution.

It is for the Assembly to deal with the nature of junior Ministers by internal debate.

Mr. Öpik: As the Minister rightly says, there is no reference to junior Ministers in the Good Friday agreement, so the issue had to be worked out afterwards. If they are a sub-category of Ministers, we can assume that they will be allocated in proportion to party strength, in accordance with the provisions of the agreement. I seek an assurance on how the Minister envisages that working.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Nothing in the amendment makes it clear that that will be done by the d'Hondt principle. The amendment leaves the nomination in the hands of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

Mr. Öpik: That is the concern that I was going to raise. Although we can assume that the posts will be allocated in accordance with the provisions of the agreement, there is no mention of that in the amendment. That is why the Liberal Democrats opposed it in another place. The hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister appear to have the right to appoint junior Ministers however they want. That seems to run against the spirit of the agreement—and perhaps the letter of it, depending on the interpretation of the term Minister.

There is only a minimal check on the procedure. The Assembly must approve the allocation by a simple majority vote. That means that junior Ministers could be drawn from just three parties. I am flagging the issue because we remain concerned that the provisions run against the d'Hondt principle, because it has not been specified in the amendment.

There is an associated concern, which the Conservatives have raised before. Previously, Northern Ireland managed with four or five Ministers. There could now be 10 Ministers and 10 junior Ministers—a fourfold increase. That could be justified on the grounds of inclusivity, but the method of allocation is in no way inclusive—it is just on the whim of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. That increases their power rather further than was envisaged in the agreement. We may trust the current First Minister and Deputy First Minister, but there is no guarantee about the actions and intentions of future incumbents.

I hope that the Minister will go some way towards allaying our fears. It would not be appropriate to call a vote on the issue, but I seek an assurance that he is sensitive to our concerns. I look forward to hearing how he feels a safeguard could be implemented to overcome them.

Dr. Godman: Subsection (1)(b) of the new clause to be inserted after clause 15 refers to the functions exercised by Ministers. If a Minister had responsibility for fisheries, would that responsibility be confined to the Northern Ireland fishing zone?

I have engaged in debate with the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and my hon. and old Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on the issue before, and, as everybody knows, many Northern Ireland fishermen fish outwith the Northern Ireland fisheries zone. A few years ago, a Northern Ireland fishing boat was almost dragged down by a nuclear submarine, and that happened far closer to Wemyss Bay than to Ballycastle or anywhere else in Northern Ireland.

The livelihood of fishermen in Northern Ireland is largely determined by decisions taken at meetings of the Council of Fisheries Ministers in Brussels. Will the Minister tell me what role a Fisheries Minister from the Northern Ireland Assembly would play in relation to those meetings? That subject caused much concern during the passage of the Scotland Bill.

Perhaps the Minister has already dealt with the matter in one of our debates that I missed. If so, I apologise to him, and to the House for detaining it unnecessarily—but I want to know whether the Fisheries Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly will be involved in the deliberations of the Council of Fisheries Ministers.

Will there be a concordat, as is to be established between the Fisheries Ministers in Edinburgh and in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? Hon. Members from Northern Ireland may say that they are well able to look after the interests of their fishermen in this place, through the Fisheries Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture.

9.15 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: I think that the Fisheries Minister here should be supported in Europe by the Ministers from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, because only those Ministers will understand the full situation and be able argue it properly and forcefully in Europe. The hon. Gentleman is making a valid point, because, as he knows, such decisions are taken in Europe, and they cannot be taken properly unless the Committee concerned, which makes the recommendation to the Commission, has the full information. I believe that the Ministers from the various Assemblies are the people who will have that full information.

Dr. Godman: As I said, we have often engaged in exchanges on that subject. I remember the hon. Gentleman complaining when a Fisheries Minister from the Irish Republic got more for his people than had been obtained by the Fisheries Minister responsible to this House.

I think that the Fisheries Ministers in the two Assemblies and the Scottish Parliament will have to work in close harmony with the Fisheries Minister in the

[Dr. Godman]

Ministry of Agriculture. That Minister is the lead Minister for the United Kingdom at meetings of the Fisheries Council, but he or she must pay close and sympathetic attention to the concerns of the fishermen of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. McNamara: There will also be the Council of the Isles in one form or another. The Minister in the Republic will be involved too, so there will be a ministerial relationship between Dublin and Westminster, and also between Belfast and Dublin. Perhaps we could develop a unified British Isles attitude towards fishing.

Mr. Robert McCartney: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I understand it, the amendment relates to the appointment of junior Ministers in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Have the matters recently under discussion any relevance to that issue?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter of order for the Chair. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) is in order at the moment.

Dr. Godman: I would not dare to step out of order with your formidable presence in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Currently, a Minister in the Northern Ireland office has responsibility for agriculture and fisheries, and some of those responsibilities will be handed over to a Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Is the Minister with that responsibility being confined to the management of the fisheries within the Northern Ireland fisheries zone, which were referred to earlier? These are important issues for our fishing communities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and elsewhere.

To respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), I said in a recent speech in Scotland that I thought that one of the major issues to be determined at meetings of the Council of the Isles—or the British-Irish Council—was pollution in the seas between Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the seas between England and Wales and the Republic. That is another very important issue for our fishermen.

I do not want to detain the House, but the Minister is aware of my interest in the management of fisheries. I would hope to see the development of a concordat between the lead Minister in the United Kingdom's Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers from Scotland, Belfast and Cardiff. I am seeking that assurance from my hon. Friend, and I hope the Ministers from the Assemblies and the Parliament will play an important role vis-a-vis the deliberations and decisions taken in Brussels.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The Minister was right to say that few, if any, in the House would oppose on principle the possibility of there being junior Ministers in the Assembly. However, the necessity for junior Ministers in the Assembly might depend entirely on the number of Departments there are and the degree of responsibility that Minsters have.

If, for instance, there were only four or five Ministers, one could argue a good case as to why they should be given some assistance and support from junior Ministers. If, on the other hand, the full complement permitted under the Bill of 10 Departments—and therefore 10 Ministers—were to be taken up, the case begins to diminish.

At present, we have two Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office who do all of the work that would be transferred under the Bill. About half of the duties of the two Ministers, who are sitting on the Front Bench, would be in matters which are to be transferred—roughly speaking. That means that, in total, we have the equivalent of three existing Ministers who are doing the work. However, under the provisions of the Bill, there could be 10 Ministers in the Departments, a First Minister, a Deputy First Minister and, on top of that, a plethora of junior Ministers who could also be appointed.

I happen to come from the school of thought that says that one Ulster man can do what three English, Scottish or Welsh men could do, but this proposal seems to be putting that in reverse. Perhaps a dozen or so Ulster men will take over what, effectively, three English, Scottish and Welsh Ministers are doing at present.

The case for junior Ministers still has to be argued, although, in fairness, it must be said that the visibility and closeness of Northern Ireland Ministers will probably mean that they have much more work to do than existing Ministers. They will not be able to hide or escape as easily as present Ministers have been wont to do, and their availability will increase their work load. Of course, the experiences on which I draw apply to both sides of the House.

Although I agree with the principle that there is no reason that there should not be junior Ministers, I am not convinced that a case is to be made for having them. Such a case could be made only after the existing Departments have been working for some time and the work load that falls on the shoulders of Ministers and the Deputy First and First Ministers can be properly assessed.

Junior Ministers will not be working within the 10 Departments as some people have suggested. That is not present thinking among those who are meeting at Stormont. Their view is that junior Ministers should work entirely in the central office and, effectively, take on tasks that run across Departments—for instance, Europe, equality issues and matters that would impinge on more than one departmental responsibility.

The notion that departmental Ministers will each have a junior Minister is wrong. Indeed, under the system that the Minister of State is to throw upon our laps, it would be a disaster. Can one imagine the possibility of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister deciding to appoint a Sinn Fein junior Minister to a Department that had a Democratic Unionist party Minister? One does not need to think about that too long to realise the problems that could arise. Yet, if appointments are left solely to the discretion of the First and Deputy First Ministers, that and many other conflicts could occur.

I have read through the agreement in great detail many times. The parties who were signatories to it seemed to accept the principle that the d'Hondt method of appointment should be used for posts within the Assembly—whether ministerial, a chairmanship or a deputy chairmanship. Clearly, the system was laid out in the agreement. If it is right that a Deputy Chairman should be appointed under d'Hondt, it must be right that a junior Minister should be similarly appointed. Why are the

Government not consistent? Why do they not follow through what was clearly the established principle within the agreement?

Once again, the Government are attempting to prop up a certain political cabal within the Assembly. The Minister recognises that a certain person does not have much support at present and that he needs to prop him up. So what does the hon. Gentleman do? He provides him with the instrument that Governments often use to prop themselves up—patronage. He allows him to have the instrument that he can use to keep people in line. So, having ensured in the previous set of amendments that no changes can take place, even if all but one of the Members' party move to another group, the hon. Gentleman is now allowing the First Minister and Deputy First Minister a mechanism whereby they can effectively buy support within the Assembly. Again, that is not good for the democratic process.

If the Bill does not expressly indicate what positions there could be within the Assembly, will the Minister say whether the Assembly is entitled to create those positions? Is that sound under the Bill? For example, if there are 10 Ministers, a First Minister and Deputy First Minister and, perhaps, 12 junior Ministers for all we know, will the First Minister and Deputy First Minister be permitted to have parliamentary private secretaries? Can the patronage be extended beyond what is contemplated in the Bill if the Assembly and the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister propose it? I hope that the Minister will respond to that question, too.

9.30 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney: Northern Ireland has a population of about 1.5 million people. It has a devolved Assembly containing 108 elected Members and 26 local councils. Under the Bill, it will be subjected to a raft of implementation bodies, which are designed to bring about some consensual ecumenicism between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It will also send members to the Council of the British Isles. In other words, Northern Ireland will become the most over-governed, most expensive and over-administrated piece of ground in the United Kingdom, if not in Europe, and all that must be paid for.

A great debate is raging between the two major parties in Northern Ireland—the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists—on the number of Ministries or portfolios there should be. The agreement and the Bill provide for a maximum of 10 Ministries, with the addition of a central Ministry that will be supervised by the First Minister designate and the second Minister designate—that means that there will be 11 Ministries. The central Ministry will almost certainly look after finance and personnel, but it will have a general roving commission over the other 10 Ministries.

The criterion for the number of Ministries will be not whether 10 Ministries are required for the functional efficiency of the Administration, but the maximum number that can be obtained politically to spread government across the widest field, so that everyone is brought in, including the representatives of organised and practising terror. Sinn Fein will be in charge of two of the 10 Ministries—it is likely to choose equality and education and cultural activity.

That must all be paid for. As the Minister said in his illuminating address to the Assembly a week last Monday—he was talking about budgetary proposals and the block grant for Northern Ireland—the total cost of the 10 Ministries, with the raft of bureaucrats, civil servants, officials and other personages who are needed to service them, will come from the block grant. The piglets in government will have not only their snouts but their trotters in the trough. It is now suggested that the trough should be extended—even tinier piglets should be brought in to enjoy the Government's largesse.

Is that necessary? The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) mentioned the duties and functions of Ministers who are seconded to the Northern Ireland Office. The six or seven existing Departments seem to function well, but there will be, in addition to the 12 Ministers, an undetermined number of gofers. They will be allotted across the board from the central portfolio held by the two senior Ministers. Why? We know that, when there is a vote and the Whip is applied, all those who benefit from the fruits of office are on the payroll.

The extended payroll will be in the gift of the First and second Ministers: effectively in the gift of the Ulster Unionist and Social Democratic and Labour parties, the parties of the centre that will run the show. Those parties will effectively exercise executive government and downgrade the legislative function of the Assembly.

No mind, however fertile, ever thought for a moment of including junior Ministers in the agreement, because no one ever conceived that there would be any necessity for them. The 10 Ministers, plus the two chiefs, will have an enormous body of assistants. The place is coming down with special advisers. If only the public could see the facilities and the assistants that are being provided for Ministers in Northern Ireland, they would realise immediately that there is no reason whatever to have any junior Ministers, and especially ones who will be totally in the thrall of the First and second Ministers designate.

As the hon. Member for Belfast, East pointed, d'Hondt was written in stone in the part of the agreement relating to the electoral mandate, but now an issue to which d'Hondt does not apply and that was not predicated in the agreement has been put entirely in the gift of the First and second Ministers, when no solid case has been established for the need for the junior Ministers, who will absorb money that Northern Ireland, the Assembly and the Executive could well devote to much worthier causes than providing a source of patronage.

Some of us in Northern Ireland still have a conscience about public expenditure and believe that the measure would amount to no more than the placing of the means of bribery in the hands of the First and second Ministers.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The case has been fairly put about the over-governance that will take place in Northern Ireland. Six Departments will become 10, and the central Department will be added. Select Committees with a paid Chairman and Vice-Chairmen, elected on the d'Hondt principle, will oversee every Department. There will have to be 11 Committees, because of the new central Department.

Yes, we were under-governed—there was a deficit but it seems to me that we have now gone to the extent of having too many personnel. Because of that, I cannot understand why the Government want to raise the matter of Ministers, of which matter I take a dim view. My party had a meeting with the First Minister and his deputy. We did not understand why they were so dedicated to the idea

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

of having junior Ministers, but I have concluded that it is because they need people on the payroll, whom they can keep in line during tight votes in the Assembly.

Remember that the voting is all cross-community. Unless the total number of people voting represent the majority in each community, there is no majority. In electoral terms, what is needed to make a majority is Unionists who are in the majority in their community, and nationalists who are in the majority in theirs, voting together. There are people labelled "others" who have no part in our lot. They can make only one change, becoming Unionists or nationalists, but it is hardly likely that the Alliance party will become a Unionist party, or that the Women's Coalition will become either Unionists or nationalists.

The Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of the Select Committees will be important. The Committees will have great power: they will be able to summons Ministers, persons and papers to answer. It will be some Government when all that gets going. The proposal in the amendment should never have been put to us—any suggestion that we should be doubling up is wrong. Perhaps the Ministers here tonight would like to propose to the Prime Minister that he gives all of them deputies to help alleviate the overloading. After all, there are six Departments, so why should those running them now not have assistants?

Mr. Paul Murphy: What an interesting debate. It centred on three separate issues, and I shall deal first with the one raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman), who spoke specifically about the role of Fisheries Ministers in the new Northern Ireland Administration.

I should say first that junior Ministers can have no statutory functions, but they can assist other Ministers. Therefore, on fisheries, a Northern Ireland Minister would have power over the Northern Ireland zone and, beyond the zone, over Northern Ireland-licensed boats—in other words, exactly the same position as in Scotland. The Minister concerned would be involved in European Union discussions, subject to the agreement of the United Kingdom; and, as my hon. Friend said, the issue would be covered in a concordat.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the British-Irish Council. It seems to me that the matters relating to the sea, such as pollution, the environment and fishing, would be obvious subjects for discussion in the British-Irish Council. However, matters connected with the European Union will inevitably be matters for the member states and the appropriate Ministers in that capacity.

The hon. Members for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) raised the nature of the appointment of junior Ministers. It is our belief—one with which the House of Lords concurred—that, because the agreement was silent on that point, the Assembly should determine that question. In other words, the amendments are enabling amendments. If the Assembly wishes, it can use the d'Hondt principle or any other method it wants—it is for the Assembly to decide by a majority.

The hon. Members for Belfast, East and for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) all raised the question whether junior Ministers should exist at all. The hon. and learned Member for North Down spoke at some length on the lack of a need for junior Ministers. However, a small number of junior Ministers will not greatly add to the burden of government in the way that the hon. Members suggested. They drew attention to the fact that Northern Ireland would have junior Ministers on top of councils, an Assembly with 108 members and Ministers, and they suggested that that would be a great panoply of government.

However, if we consider the situation in Wales after devolution, we see that the Welsh will have community councils, powerful unitary authorities and many public appointed bodies. Wales will also be a member of the British-Irish Council, like Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Welsh Ministers will take part in Europe alongside United Kingdom Ministers, and we must not forget the European Members of Parliament. Other parts of the UK will have similar structures.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Will the Minister say how many Members will sit in the Welsh Assembly and what the population of Wales is, compared with that of Northern Ireland?

9.45 pm

Mr. Murphy: The Assembly will have 60 Members and the population is 3 million, as the hon. and learned Gentleman knows. He also knows that people in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales voted for the proposals. People in Northern Ireland voted in the referendum for 108 Members of the Assembly. He knows full well also that the Assembly will have so many Members because it has to be acceptable to all the people of Northern Ireland, and that is achieved through a system of the single transferable vote. We must compare costs, and the hon. and learned Gentleman asked me how much the proposals will cost. I can tell him that security in Northern Ireland has cost £1 billion a year. If the price of peace and political stability is 108 Members and the existence of junior Ministers, it is a price worth paying.

Mr. Peter Robinson: That is are paying the IRA's price.

Mr. Murphy: That is another issue. We are talking now about Members and junior Ministers. The talks process did not address the issue in detail. If it had, matters would be much easier for us, because the House would be able to implement what had been agreed. That is why we say that it should be for the Assembly to determine the role and number of junior Ministers.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 16

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Lords amendment: No. 46, in page 9, line 20, leave out ("the") and insert ("each").

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 66 to 71, 73, 74 and 377.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments parallel amendments already made to the clauses on Northern Ireland Ministers.

They include adjusting the d'Hondt formula in the way already done for Ministers, to provide that the formula should be run on the basis of the party's strength at the first meeting of the Assembly, thus fully reflecting its electoral mandate.

Other changes are more technical, including tidying up the provisions on how Committee Chairmen are to be replaced, and giving parties' nominating officers the power to dismiss their appointees. Perhaps amendment No. 67 is the most significant. It sets out on the face of the Bill the requirement for Standing Orders to ensure that Committees have the powers set out in paragraph 9 of strand 1 of the Belfast agreement. The Bill always gave Committees of the Assembly a key role, but amendment No. 67 addresses the concerns expressed by some parties during the consultation exercise.

There is also one entirely drafting amendment to the provisions on the Executive Committee of the Assembly. That is amendment No. 377, which is transitional and provides that any Committees established, and Chairmen appointed, during the shadow phase will carry forward after devolution.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 17

NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS

Lords amendment: No. 47, in page 9, line 31, at end insert—

("(3) If an Act of the Assembly which establishes a new Northern Ireland department provides for it to be in the charge of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly—

(a) the department shall not be regarded as a Northern Ireland department for the purposes of subsection (2) or (3) of section (*Ministerial Offices*); and

(b) the office held by those Ministers as the head of the department shall not be regarded as a Ministerial office for the purposes of subsection (4) of that section or section 15.").

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 48, 49, 375 and 376.

Mr. Murphy: These amendments deal with the location of prerogative and statutory power after devolution. Amendment No. 47 reflects the interest shown by some parties during the consultation process in creating a Department of the centre, to which several hon. Members have referred, under the joint control of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. Such a Department has obvious parallels in Whitehall. A similar Department was in existence during previous devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland. Its functions would be entirely for the Northern Ireland parties in the Assembly to determine, but could include both policy co-ordination and statutory functions.

There is no explicit provision for such a Department in the Belfast agreement. Therefore, we have provided for such a Department to be created by an Act of the Assembly. However, if the parties agree on its creation during the shadow phase, the transitional provisions of the Bill will enable it to continue in existence after devolution. The new clause also ensures that, if such a Department is created, it will not count towards the Bill's maximum of 10 ministerial offices, nor will it count towards d'Hondt.

Amendment No. 48 deals with statutory functions after devolution. During earlier consideration of the Bill in this House, there was some confusion about the scope of clause 18 on the prerogative and other Executive power. The clause gave the impression that the majority of Executive authority in Northern Ireland would be exercised by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister acting jointly. In fact, of course, the prerogative is only a small part of all Executive power. Accordingly, the new clause deals with the most significant element of Executive authority—statutory power.

Statutory functions in Northern Ireland are generally vested in the Departments, under the control and direction of their Ministers. The new clause makes it clear that that will continue to be the case. Amendment No. 49 recasts clause 18, which deals with prerogative and other Executive powers. Despite the sometimes grand language of the clause, it deals with far less significant functions than those covered by the new clause that precedes it. As the amendment makes clear, the most significant prerogative power exercisable under the clause is the management of the Northern Ireland civil service. Prerogative and other Executive powers also include a series of more minor powers that the Government can exercise in the same way as a normal citizen, such as the power to enter into contracts.

Other than clarifying, in subsection (3), the position with respect to the Northern Ireland civil service, the main significance of the amendment is the ability it gives to Northern Ireland Ministers to exercise prerogative powers directly without being authorised explicitly by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. That is important for administrative reasons, since even relatively mundane departmental tasks, such as publishing leaflets, depend to a degree on using prerogative powers, and it would clearly be absurdly cumbersome to require explicit approval for those tasks.

Amendments Nos. 375 and 376 are transitional. They provide that any Department established during the shadow phase under the joint control of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister may carry on after devolution. Amendment No. 378 similarly ensures that prerogative orders made under the 1973 Letters Patent can remain in force after devolution.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 48 and 49 agreed to.

Clause 19

COMMUNITY LAW, CONVENTION RIGHTS ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 50, in page 10, line 1, at end insert (", confirm or approve").

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 51 to 55.

Mr. Ingram: The amendments make drafting and technical improvements to clause 19, which prevents

[Mr. Ingram]

Ministers and Northern Ireland Departments from doing things—including making legislation—which are incompatible with rights under the European convention on human rights or European Union law, or which involve discrimination on grounds of religious belief or political opinion. They enable us to set out clearly the possible conduct that we intend to prevent, and to bring certain additional matters within the scope of the clause so as to bring it into line with other provisions of the Bill.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 51 to 61 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 62, after clause 20, to insert the following new clause—*Quotas for purposes of international etc obligations—*

".—(1) A Minister of the Crown may make an order containing provision such as is specified in subsection (2) where—

(a) an international obligation or an obligation under Community law is an obligation to achieve a result defined by reference to a quantity (whether expressed as an amount, proportion or ratio or otherwise); and

(b) the quantity relates to the United Kingdom (or to an area including the United Kingdom or to an area consisting of a part of the United Kingdom which is or includes the whole or part of Northern Ireland).

(2) The provision referred to in subsection (1) is provision for the achievement by a Minister or Northern Ireland department (in the exercise of his or its functions) of so much of the result to be achieved under the international obligation or obligation under Community law as is specified in the order.

(3) The order may specify the time by which any part of the result to be achieved by the Minister or department is to be achieved.

(4) Where an order under subsection (1) is in force in relation to an international obligation or an obligation under Community law, the obligation shall have effect for the purposes of this Act as if it were an obligation to achieve so much of the result to be achieved under the obligation as is specified in the order by the time or times so specified.

(5) No order shall be made by a Minister of the Crown under subsection (1) unless he has consulted the Minister or Department concerned."

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 63 to 65.

Mr. Ingram: Amendment No. 62 permits the making of an order determining the Northern Ireland share of a quota imposed on the United Kingdom by virtue of an international or European Community obligation. The same provision applies in the case of Wales and in amendments to the Scotland Bill. That is necessary to ensure that the United Kingdom as a whole meets its international obligations.

Amendments Nos. 63 to 65 allow arrangements to be made for Northern Ireland Departments to carry out functions on behalf of other devolved UK Administrations, including the Government, or vice versa. Agency arrangements were provided for in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 and the inclusion of public bodies and holders of public office in the provisions enables authorities outside central Government Departments in devolved Administrations to act on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, should the need arise.

The amendments achieve parity among all three devolved systems and I commend them to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 63 to 76 agreed to.

Clause 23

EXCLUSION OF MINISTERS FROM OFFICE

Lords amendment: No. 77, in page 12, line 18, leave out from ("because") to ("other") in line 19 and insert

("it is not committed to such of its members as are or might become Ministers or junior Ministers observing the")

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 79 and 81.

Mr. Murphy: The Government amendments in this group reflect comments made during earlier stages of the Bill and during our consultation with the Northern Ireland parties during the recess.

Amendment No. 77 addresses the feelings that many had that the Bill's provisions on excluding parties from office were too vague. In particular, it was felt that the ability to exclude a party because of the "likely failure" of its members to uphold the pledge of office was too hard to judge and could leave a party vulnerable to exclusion because of the behaviour of an individual.

The amendment makes it clear that exclusion under the provision is based on the Assembly's judgment of the party's policy and is possible if the Assembly believes that the party is not committed to its Ministers upholding the pledge of office. For example, a party might come up with a firm policy of not complying with the decisions of the Executive Committee or reject out of hand the provisions of the ministerial code of conduct.

Amendment No. 81 ensures that if the Secretary of State believes that the Assembly should consider a motion for exclusion, she must require the Presiding Officer to move a motion for the Assembly to debate and to vote on.

During earlier stages of the Bill in this place, hon. Members pointed out that the Bill gave the Secretary of State the option not to press for a motion for exclusion, even if she felt that one would be justified in the circumstances. Government amendment No. 79 is therefore purely a drafting point, making it clear that all resolutions under the clause will require cross-community support to be successful. I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 78 to 82 agreed to.

Clause 24

DATES OF ELECTIONS AND DISSOLUTIONS

Lords amendment: No. 83, in page 13, line 27, at end insert—

("(3A) An Assembly elected under this section or section (*Extraordinary elections*) shall meet within the period of eight days beginning with the day of the poll at which it is elected.

(3B) For the purposes of subsection (3A), a Saturday, a Sunday, Christmas Day, Good Friday and any day which is a bank holiday in Northern Ireland shall be disregarded.")

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 84 to 86 and 104.

Mr. Ingram: Once again, the amendments reflect the valuable debates that we have had on the Bill here and in the other place. Amendment No. 83 provides for the Assembly to meet within eight days of its election, and is clearly an essential amendment.

The broad theme of the group is the Secretary of State's exceptional powers to deal with crises in the devolved institutions. As it passed through the House during the earlier stages, the Bill included a number of such powers. The Secretary of State had the power to dissolve the Assembly and call fresh elections if she believed that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Northern Ireland Ministers were not able to carry out their functions. Similarly, the Secretary of State had the power to prorogue the Assembly without fresh elections.

During debates on the Bill, there was general agreement across the party divide in Northern Ireland that such powers amounted to planning for failure, which could prove counter-productive.

The people of Northern Ireland have made clear their views on the Belfast agreement. It is in no one's interests to be seen to undermine the structures that received such an overwhelming endorsement at the polls.

We have considered the views expressed in this place and from the parties, and the amendments accordingly remove the exceptional powers of the Secretary of State. The option of Westminster legislation always remains—

It being Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Lords amendments stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the European Parliamentary Elections Bill and the consideration of any Lords Messages and Amendments that may be received may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On today's Order Paper there is a business motion in the name of the Prime Minister enabling the House to consider any messages and amendments from the Lords in respect of the European Parliamentary Elections Bill.

Following the Government's defeat in another place, it is open to the Government to bring that Bill back for a fifth time. I understand that there has been a statement in another place, but there has been no statement in this House about the Government's intentions. Will the Home Secretary now explain to the House what he plans to do about the Bill?

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): As many right hon. and hon. Members will by now be aware, the decision of the House early this evening in respect of the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, which was carried by a majority of this House of 193, was rejected in the other place by a majority of 29.

The European Parliamentary Elections Bill has therefore been lost for this Session. It will be reintroduced in the next Session under the procedures of the Parliament Acts. Even so, to hold the June 1999 European elections under the regional list system, the Bill would have to receive Royal Assent by mid-January of next year. That can happen only with the co-operation of the Opposition parties.

If that co-operation is not forthcoming, the Government will still use the Parliament Acts to secure the Bill's enactment, but that would mean that the new system could not come into effect until 2004.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): We must now move on—

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it related to the statement?

Mr. Hogg: It is a matter of procedure, and I want to take your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that we are in the middle of a strictly time-limited debate. The statement does not warrant further debate. I hope that he will be brief.

Mr. Hogg: I will indeed be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I refer you to page 308 of "Erskine May", and the passage that states:

"Substantive interventions on points of order made by Ministers may be treated by the Speaker as statements, so that questions may be raised thereon and replies given."

[Mr. Hogg]

We have had an intervention on a point of order by the Home Secretary, which clearly enables the House, if you give us consent, to ask questions of him. I ask you to exercise the discretion provided in "Erskine May" and enable us to treat that point of order as a statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The key word in the passage quoted by the right hon. and learned Gentleman is "may". It depends entirely on the view that the Chair takes. My view is that we should now continue with the time-limited debate.

Northern Ireland Bill

Lords amendments again considered.

Question again proposed, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

10.4 pm

Mr. Ingram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am grateful for your observations and instructions to Opposition Members, who clearly have no interest in this Northern Ireland legislation. They have entered the Chamber to rejoice about another matter, which they claim is about democracy. This legislation extends democracy to Northern Ireland, but Opposition Members are not prepared to listen to the debate.

Before the points of order, I pointed out that the option of Westminster legislation always remains if the devolved institutions are seen not to be working. However, we clearly do not want to work on that assumption from the start of the new Assembly. Amendment No. 85 therefore restructures the Bill's provisions on extraordinary elections, bringing them more into line with the provisions in the Scotland Bill.

Accordingly, the new clause leaves the power to call early elections with the Assembly, on a majority of two thirds of all Members—not just those who vote. In addition, a fresh election will be triggered if the Assembly fails to elect a First Minister and Deputy First Minister within six weeks. Amendment No. 104 deletes altogether the Secretary of State's power to prorogue the Assembly. The other amendment in the group, No. 86, is consequential on the new provisions regarding extraordinary elections. I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 84 to 86 agreed to.

Clause 27

VACANCIES

Lords amendment: No. 87, in page 14, line 39, at end insert—

("( ) The validity of any proceedings of the Assembly is not affected by any vacancy in its membership.").

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 88, 91 to 103 and 276.

Mr. Murphy: This is a rather large group of amendments covering with a series of related and technical issues, but dealing broadly with the powers, privileges and proceedings of the Assembly.

Amendments Nos. 93 and 96 concerning the Assembly's power to call witnesses and papers are relatively minor and technical. The most important is amendment No. 97. It enables the Presiding Officer to apply an oath to a witness, meaning that those giving untruthful answers will be guilty of perjury. Amendment

No. 87 makes it clear that the Assembly's proceedings will not be invalidated by any vacancies in its membership.

Several other amendments concern the Assembly's privileges. In line with the Scotland and Wales legislation, amendments Nos. 102 and 103 provide that those reporting the Assembly's proceedings will not be liable to conviction for contempt of court under the strict liability rule only if the reports are also "accurate" and "in good faith". Amendment No. 88 deals with the issue of disqualification, providing for cases of bankruptcy and mental illness along similar lines to the Scotland Bill.

Amendments Nos. 91 and 276 concern the Assembly's Standing Orders. They make it clear that the Standing Orders require cross-community support to be amended or repealed as well as made, and delete from schedule 6 redundant references to the Royal Assent. Amendment No. 92 alters the Bill's provisions on petitions of concern.

As the Bill stands, a petition of concern leads automatically to a vote on the issue, which then requires cross-community support in order to succeed. During consultation with the parties, it was made clear to us that they felt that paragraph 13 of strand 1 to the Good Friday agreement should enable petitions of concern to be dealt with by the Special Committee procedure set out in paragraph 11 of strand 1. The agreement provides for the paragraph 11 Committee to examine and report on whether a measure or proposal for legislation is in conformity with equality requirements, including the European convention on human rights and the Bill of Rights. This amendment requires the Assembly, through its Standing Orders, to set out procedures by which petitions of concern may be referred to such a Committee for scrutiny, and thus brings the Bill closer to the provisions of the agreement.

Amendments Nos. 98 to 101 are technical and concern remuneration of Assembly Members. Amendment No. 98 provides for higher salaries to be paid to holders of junior ministerial office. Amendment No. 99 provides for higher salaries to be paid to Members of the Assembly Commission. Amendment No. 100 sets out rules for continued payment of Members' salaries after dissolution. Amendment No. 101 is consequential on amendment No. 98. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Öpik: I have one point to make, relating to amendment No. 100. Although it deals primarily with remuneration, I understand that it also allows Members of the Assembly to keep their title and status during elections for the new Assembly. There is a contrast with Members of Parliament: even if they are re-elected, they are not MPs during the election.

I understand the remuneration point, but my slight concern is that the amendment's provisions favour incumbents at election times, and I presume that that reflects the fact that the Government have consulted with incumbents. I want to be clear about whether I have understood the amendment correctly and, if so, whether the Minister is concerned about that issue.

Mr. Ingram: My understanding of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes is the same.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 88 agreed to.

Clause 32

COMMISSION

Lords amendment: No. 89, in page 17, line 3, leave out ("the statutory functions conferred on the Commission;") and insert

("the functions conferred on the Commission by virtue of any enactment;")

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 90 and 272 to 275.

Mr. Ingram: This is a group of minor and technical amendments to the provisions for an Assembly Commission. The principal function of the Commission is to provide the Assembly—or to ensure that the Assembly is provided with—the property, staff and services required for the Assembly's purposes.

The amendments enable the Commission to charge for goods and services, and make a number of other minor and technical changes to the provisions on bringing proceedings by, or against, the Commission; on the Commission's status as a Crown body; and on its functions. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The Minister may draw my attention to an amendment in the group entitled "Miscellaneous and supplemental", but the Assembly Commission met the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, in relation to the exercise of control in the Stormont estate. I think that we have reached a mutually satisfactory arrangement, but it would be helpful if it was given to us from the Dispatch Box so that it is clear that the Commission will be in control—not only of Parliament buildings, but of the apron of land that goes down in front of Parliament buildings—so that no demonstrations can take place without the Assembly's permission.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Assembly Commission—other hon. Members may not know that—and has been involved in the debate about the Stormont estate. Discussions have been proceeding, and agreements that have been reached within those discussions will, of course, be honoured. I can give him that assurance from the Dispatch Box.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 90 to 104 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 105, after clause 43, to insert the following new clause—*("Part IVA—*

NSMC, BIC, BIIC ETC.

NORTH-SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL AND BRITISH-IRISH COUNCIL

.—(1) The First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly shall make such nominations of Ministers and junior Ministers (including where appropriate alternative nominations) as they consider necessary to ensure—

(a) such cross-community participation in the North-South Ministerial Council as is required by the Belfast Agreement; and

(b) such cross-community participation in the British–Irish Council as is so required.

(2) It shall be a Ministerial responsibility of a Minister or junior Minister nominated under subsection (1)(a) or (b) to participate in the Council concerned in such meetings or activities as are specified in the nomination.

(3) Without prejudice to the operation of section 19, such a Minister or junior Minister shall act in accordance with any decisions of the Assembly or the Executive Committee which are relevant to his participation in the Council concerned.

(4) A Minister may in writing authorise a Minister or junior Minister who has been nominated under subsection (1)(a) or (b) to enter into agreements or arrangements in respect of matters for which he is responsible.

(5) The First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly shall, as far in advance of each meeting of either Council as is reasonably practicable, give to the Executive Committee and to the Assembly the following information in relation to the meeting—

(a) the date;

(b) the agenda; and

(c) nominations made under subsection (1) for the purposes of the meeting.

(6) A Minister or junior Minister who participates in a meeting of either Council by reason of a nomination under this section shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after the meeting, make a report—

(a) to the Executive Committee; and

(b) to the Assembly.

(7) A report under subsection (6)(b) shall be made orally unless standing orders authorise it to be made in writing.

(8) The Northern Ireland contributions towards the expenses of the Councils shall be defrayed as expenses of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

(9) In this section "participate" shall be construed—

(a) in relation to the North-South Ministerial Council, in accordance with paragraphs 5 and 6 of Strand Two of the Belfast Agreement;

(b) in relation to the British-Irish Council, in accordance with the first paragraph 5 of Strand Three of that Agreement.")

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 106 to 108 and 158 to 160.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments relate to strands 2 and 3 of the agreement, and respond to points made when the Bill was being considered in the House and to consultations with the Northern Ireland parties. Together, the amendments introduce new clauses to replace clauses 65 to 67 in the Bill as it left this House.

Amendment No. 105 deals with the participation of Ministers and junior Ministers in the North-South Ministerial Council and British-Irish Council. It incorporates a number of important points that I know have exercised the minds of many Northern Ireland Members. It requires the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to ensure that participation in each of the councils is that which is required by the Belfast agreement, including, specifically, that participation be on a cross-community basis, as set out in paragraph 30 of strand 1. That is an important safeguard in ensuring that the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland are taken into account when business is conducted in the councils.

Throughout consideration of the clauses, an important dimension has been the authority and accountability of Ministers participating in the North-South Ministerial Council. Before we went into recess, I told the House, and I repeat, that as a Minister I understand the importance of accountability—of the authority of decision making resting ultimately with the House of Commons and, in Northern Ireland's case, with the Assembly. Therefore, we have responded to a number of concerns that were expressed by hon. Members and by parties.

10.15 pm

The new clause makes it clear that Ministers and junior Ministers must act in accordance with relevant decisions of the Assembly and Executive Committee. It also requires openness and transparency in the operation of the council—an important aspect of accountability. The Assembly will be given advance notice of the date, agenda and nominations for each meeting, and Ministers will be required by law to report back afterwards.

Furthermore, the new clause makes it clear that Ministers in the North-South Ministerial Council must act in accordance with paragraphs 5 and 6 of strand 2 of the agreement. Paragraph 5 sets out the various levels at which Ministers will participate in the council, and paragraph 6 outlines the authority for such participation. It states that each side is to be in a position to take decisions within the defined authority of those attending, and that each side remains accountable to the Assembly and Oireachtas respectively, whose approval would be required for decisions going beyond Ministers' defined authority. The clause puts it beyond any doubt that Ministers have authority to participate in the North-South Ministerial Council only to the extent that such participation is in accordance with paragraphs 5 and 6 of strand 2.

Amendment No. 106 ensures that the Assembly has power to legislate in respect of agreements or arrangements made in the North-South Ministerial Council and British-Irish Council. Under that part of the Bill, Ministers will be able not only to consult the Irish Government but, in relation to devolved matters, to conclude agreements and arrangements within the framework of the councils. The clauses do not confer the power to conclude treaties, or other agreements binding in international law. Where it is necessary for matters to be provided for in a treaty, that would be concluded by the British Government.

Amendment No. 106 also contains provision in relation to the accountability of the North-South Ministerial Council by making it clear that no agreement to establish a new implementation body shall come into operation without the specific approval of the Assembly, in line with paragraph 12 of strand 2.

Amendment No. 107 deals with the British-Irish intergovernmental conference and requires the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to ensure such cross-community attendance by Ministers and junior Ministers as is required by the agreement at meetings where excepted or reserved Northern Ireland matters are to be discussed.

It was a cause of some frustration that there was no involvement of the elected representatives of Northern Ireland when the British and Irish Governments previously

came together in the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference. That is now being remedied in the new British-Irish intergovernmental conference.

Amendment No. 108 provides for the Secretary of State to make orders in respect of the initial north-south implementation bodies. The clause, as amended, applies only to the initial, agreed implementation bodies. Those bodies are to be agreed by representatives of the Northern Ireland Administration and the Irish Government, and established formally by international treaties concluded between the British and Irish Governments. They will then need to be given any requisite capacities and functions in domestic legislation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That is the purpose of the Secretary of State's power to make orders under the clause.

If further implementation bodies are agreed, it will be for the Northern Ireland Assembly to make the necessary legislation.

I believe that the new institutions have the potential to develop positive relationships and practical co-operation in the island of Ireland, and in these islands, in a way that will deliver real benefits to all the people. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Robert McCartney: As the Minister will know, one of the great fears of the pro-Union community in Northern Ireland relates to the subject matter of these provisions, especially given that the Government of the Republic of Ireland hold, in their present constitution, that it is a constitutional imperative to act under paragraphs 2 and 3 of that constitution to create a united Ireland to include the territory of Northern Ireland.

The Minister will also know that it has been the policy of successive British Governments to stand by the declaration of disinterest made in the joint declaration of 15 December 1993, in which the then British Government declared that they had no strategic, economic or selfish reason for remaining in Northern Ireland.

The Minister will be aware that the majority—pro-Union—community in Northern Ireland fear that the arrangements are intended to effect, in accordance with the policies that I have mentioned, a factually and functionally united Ireland, and that the implementation bodies currently being put in place are but the forerunners, or the thin edge of the wedge, intended to ease Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom as part of a transitional phase, recognised as such by one of the main participants in the agreement. I refer to Sinn Fein-IRA, which has repeatedly said that it views the agreement and the Bill as nothing more than a phase for the purpose of ensuring a transition to the ultimate objective of a united Irish socialist republic.

I do not have a copy of the Belfast agreement with me, but the Minister mentioned that under the terms of paragraph 6 each Minister would have power to make decisions within the limits of his authority. Under paragraph 6, would a Sinn Fein Minister appointed under the d'Hondt system with responsibility for, say, education, and acting according to a broad Government programme for the year, be entitled to enter into arrangements with his counterpart from the Dail and bind the Assembly, if he had made a decision within the limits of his authority? Or is the Minister saying that the provisions will ensure that, ultimately, the Assembly will have to give authority and approval to any decision made by the relevant Minister?

I am particularly concerned about subsection (3) of the new clause that would be inserted if Lords amendment No. 105 were agreed to. It states:

"Without prejudice to the operation of section 19, such a Minister or junior Minister shall act in accordance with any decisions of the Assembly or the Executive Committee which are relevant to his participation in the Council concerned."

As the Minister will know, there is quite a distinction between a decision of the Assembly and a decision of the Executive Committee, but the proposed new clause suggests that either may give authority.

It is extremely important that the people of Northern Ireland should know whether the Assembly or the Executive will give ultimate approval, and if it is the latter, exactly what constitutes that "Executive"? Is it a Minister acting within the limits of his authority as part of the Executive? Is it a combined number of Ministers—the entire Executive, including the First Minister and Deputy First Minister? What exactly is meant by "the Executive" in those circumstances?

Mr. Peter Robinson: This group of amendments constitutes not so much a group of amendments as a completely new Bill. The Minister is proposing to leave out the original clause 43 and to insert substantial new clauses, thereby demonstrating that the Bill is being entirely re-written. He could therefore assist the House by providing more details on this group of amendments than he has provided on previous groups.

Specifically, the wording of the amendments make it clear that the participants in both the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council will be cross-community participants. I expect that the Minister will be able to confirm that that is to ensure that we do not have a Sinn Fein Minister going down on his or her own and taking decisions on his or her own. However, I have not read anything in the Bill saying that Northern Ireland Ministers must be unanimous in decisions on whether to agree provisions formulated with their counterparts in the Irish Republic.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister—to take the example given by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney)—might take along with them an Education Minister who might well be from Sinn Fein, so that two nationalists and one Unionist would be attending. Will a majority be sufficient to make a decision—or is that matter yet to be played for, in the Assembly's standing orders or in other provisions regulating Ministers' behaviour at those meetings? It is important—it is essential—that the matter be clarified.

Mr. Öpik: Is not the matter resolved by subsection (4) in Lords amendment No. 106, which states:

"No agreement or arrangement to which this section applies entered into for the establishment after the appointed day of an implementation body shall come into operation without the approval of the Assembly."?

Does not that mean that the Assembly will have to approve all the matters about which the hon. Gentleman is concerned?

Mr. Robinson: I was dealing not with implementation bodies but with the North-South Ministerial Council. They are quite separate structures. I hope that I shall be able shortly to deal with implementation bodies.

[Mr. Robinson]

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for North Down mentioned his concerns about subsection (3) of Lords amendment No. 105, which can be read in many different ways. I can see nowhere within the provision a requirement that the Assembly's agreement be given beforehand or its approval be given afterwards.

The provision certainly allows for such approval to be given, and certainly requires Ministers to act if agreements have been reached. However, nowhere does it say that a Minister cannot act in reaching agreements in the north-south body unless the Assembly has reached a decision on such agreements. Neither does it say that a Minister must come back and seek the Assembly's approval. If there is to be accountability to the Assembly, there must be such requirements. Will the Minister explain his views on where accountability lies in the new clause?

I am mindful of the fact that, in the Ulster Unionist party manifesto, the party leader expressly stated that he and his party would secure two specific elements in an agreement on north-south councils. One was that north-south bodies would be accountable. The second was that they would be consultative, not executive. If they have implementation roles, they are executive, not merely consultative. To that extent, the leader of the Ulster Unionist party has broken his election commitment.

I want to find out whether the other election commitment on accountability has also been broken. The issue is not that accountability should be allowed under certain circumstances, but that there should be accountability under all circumstances in the Assembly.

10.30 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: I should like the Minister to look again at the new clause in amendment No. 105, which says:

"Without prejudice to the operation of section 19, such a Minister or junior Minister shall act in accordance with any decisions of the Assembly or the Executive Committee which are relevant to his participation in the Council concerned."

The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) has rightly pointed out that there is a difference between a decision made in the Assembly and a decision made in the Executive Committee. Not all Members of the Assembly would necessarily know of a decision made in the Executive Committee. Will a Minister have the power to act unilaterally with his colleague in the Dublin Government on a matter that has been agreed with the Northern Ireland Executive Committee rather than with the Assembly?

The new clause also says:

"A Minister or junior Minister who participates in a meeting of either Council by reason of a nomination under this section shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after the meeting, make a report".

There is a great difference between making a report and asking the Assembly to approve what has been done.

The new clause also says that the report will be made orally—not even in writing. There is no requirement for it to be agreed by the Assembly. There is a great difference between reporting something that has taken place and that matter taking place solely under the authority that the Assembly has ratified. That causes us grave concern. I should like the Minister to tell us what he understands about those two issues.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I shall be very brief. I am conscious of the fact that the time for the debate is limited, and we are dealing with very complicated matters. The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) will remember that, on one occasion earlier in the proceedings, he quoted me, did not give way to me, said that he would give way later in his speech, forgot and then kindly came up to apologise to me. I am claiming the injury time that derives from that moment.

On this occasion, I am wholly on the side of the hon. and learned Member for North Down and the hon. Members for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). I recognise the sensitivity of the issues that we are discussing. I noticed the Minister wince and look at the clock when he was asked for a fuller explanation. The time that we have to debate the amendments is wholly the fault of the Government. Unlike the three previous speakers, who oppose the agreement, I support it. I should be greatly in the Minister's debt if he gave a fuller account than has been given so far.

Mr. Paul Murphy: Any wincing or looking at clocks was entirely due to tiredness on my part, rather than any discourtesy intended to any hon. Members.

Some interesting points were made in Committee, on Report and during consultation. The issue is of considerable importance, particularly to the Unionist community. I shall do my best to address the concerns.

The part of the Bill that deals with such matters is now much bigger than it was before the summer; that is a direct consequence of consultation. I believe that the various points that I mentioned earlier go a long way towards addressing hon. Members' concerns.

Let me briefly reiterate some of those in general terms. Northern Ireland participation must be on a cross-community basis. That is vital, and it is written into strand 2 of the agreement. It means that, in any participation, a Unionist and a nationalist must take part, and there must be agreement between them before any decisions are reached.

Let us look at what we mean by decisions. Members asked about the role of the Executive Committee vis-a-vis the Assembly. We put into the Bill a specific reference to the various paragraphs of the agreement, such as paragraphs 5 and 6 of strand 2. Paragraph 6 is especially significant, because it refers to "defined authority" and

"the arrangements in place for co-ordination of executive functions within each jurisdiction".

Clearly that is a reference to the Executive Committee.

Hon. Members will know that decisions that require any money, for example, must go back to the Assembly, because it is the Assembly that votes the money. Decisions that require any legislative action must also go back to the Assembly, because it is the Assembly that passes the laws and must therefore decide.

Hon. Members will also know that any new implementation body—that is a possibility, of course—has to be approved by the Assembly. Is it not also true

that any Minister worth his or her salt knows that, if he or she cannot carry the Assembly—on a cross-community basis, Unionists and nationalists—ultimately there will be no support for the proposal?

The north-south bodies and the implementation bodies that go with them—

Mr. Peter Robinson: Is the Minister saying that the extent of accountability depends on the grace and favour of a Minister and whether he or she is, in the Minister's words, "worth his or her salt"? If the requirement is not legislative and if there is already money in the Minister's budget, there is no requirement for the Minister to go back and obtain the approval of the Assembly.

Mr. Murphy: There are other ways in which the Assembly itself can determine the methods by which Ministers will report back to it. For example, it is open to the Assembly, through its Standing Orders Committee, to authorise Ministers to report to the Executive Committee and the Assembly in writing. That is the purpose of Standing Orders. We do not put everything in the Bill—

Mr. Robinson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Murphy: No, I shall not, for a moment. I shall finish my point first; then, by all means, the hon. Gentleman may intervene again.

Of course the Assembly, as it develops its own way of working, will ensure that those things happen and, that there is accountability. I also think—

Rev. Ian Paisley *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend has already asked to intervene. Who wants to speak first? I give way to the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson).

Mr. Robinson: The Minister well knows the issue at stake. If a Minister has to be accountable to the Assembly, the Minister will have to bring his or her proposal there and gain cross-community support for it. That requires any proposal to be one that will enjoy the support of both Unionists and nationalists. If, on the other hand, it is up to the Assembly to pull the Minister into line, a Unionist, for instance, would have to get nationalist support to stop a nationalist Minister doing something pro-nationalist.

Mr. Murphy: There is a limit to how far we can build into legislation the way in which Ministers will operate. However, the new arrangements that we have made refer specifically to the agreement, which, after all, was voted on by the people in Northern Ireland. We also have a reference to the fact that laws cannot be passed or money spent without approval, and ultimately the Assembly, through its Standing Orders arrangements, can work out how best to set up the report-back procedures. The notice to be given to the Assembly is there, too. It is clear that people must act in accordance with the wishes of the Assembly. That is there in black and white in the Bill.

We were talking about outer space earlier, and anyone who came down from outer space to look at the provisions in the Bill and asked, "Does that mean that Ministers can go out and do what they like, willy-nilly?" would realise that the answer was no, of course it does not. Ministers are properly accountable to the Assembly, but they must also take into account the cross-community aspect in terms of the North-South Ministerial Council and the Assembly.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Robert McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Perhaps I could adjudicate on who the Minister is giving way to. I call the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley).

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Minister has made a point about the Standing Orders. If the Minister, under such circumstances, makes an arrangement, must he get the approval of the Assembly? Will that be in the Standing Orders?

Mr. Murphy: The Assembly itself will decide its own Standing Orders after devolution. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) and the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) are all Members of the Assembly. They will have an important role to play when the Standing Orders are approved by the full Assembly—or, indeed, when the Committee dealing with Standing Orders devises ways in which such matters can be expressed in detail.

We have made various changes to the Bill to ensure that the Minister acts in accordance with the Assembly or the Executive Committee, and acts in accordance in respect of finance and law making. In addition, the fact that a Unionist and nationalist Minister must attend such councils will provide plenty of opportunity to ensure that there is compromise and understanding between both sides, and accountability.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Will the Minister crystallise the issue? Let us say that a Minister from the Northern Ireland Assembly goes down and meets his opposite number from the Dail—in whatever circumstances—and takes a decision that, under paragraph 6 of the Belfast agreement, he is entitled to do within the limit of his authority or remit. Having taken that decision and returned to Northern Ireland, is the Minister required to obtain the ratification of the Assembly for that decision, or does he merely have to report it and leave it to one or other of the two community parties to seek cross-community objection or support for it? Will the Assembly have the last word on a decision taken by a Minister within the limit of his authority, as prescribed by paragraph 6 of the Belfast agreement?

Mr. Murphy: Everything is in accordance with the Belfast agreement, and that is why paragraph 6 was so carefully worded. It states:

> "Each side to be in a position to take decisions in the Council within the defined authority of those attending, through the arrangements in place for co-ordination of executive functions within each jurisdiction. Each side to remain accountable".

First, he or she is not necessarily going down—they could be coming up in the North-South Ministerial Council. *[Interruption.]* That is a significant point. All this business about "going down" ignores the fact that

[Mr. Murphy]

this will be a proper North-South Ministerial Council, reflecting interest north and south of the border—and, I hope, of benefit to people north and south of the border.

Similarly, meetings—wherever they are held—will be held on a cross-community basis. We are not talking about a single person. We are talking about people going together. It is clear to me—as, I am sure, it is to hon. Members—that, if people are going together, things will not be decided in contradistinction to one side or other of the Assembly. In addition, major—and not so major—decisions will require the finance that must be voted on by the Assembly. It could mean that the Assembly would have to vote on a law, or the decisions could be relatively minor and a law would not be necessary, but decisions could nevertheless be made within that defined authority. Ultimately, Ministers will have to report their actions to the Assembly and, if any Member decides to question that report within the rules that the Standing Orders of the Assembly lay down, it can debate the issues, as we can in the House.

10.45 pm

Mr. McGrady: On that point, will the Minister confirm that paragraph (1) of amendment No. 106 states:

"This section applies to any agreement or arrangement entered into by a Minister or junior Minister participating, by reason of a nomination under section (*North-South Ministerial Council and British-Irish Council*)"?

Paragraph (4) of the amendment clearly states:

"No agreement or arrangement to which this section applies entered into for the establishment after the appointed day of an implementation body shall come into operation without the approval of the Assembly."

Is that not a self-evident requirement for the Assembly to approve any such actions?

Mr. Murphy: That certainly reinforces my arguments—*[Interruption.]* I am not sure whether we will ever persuade Ulster Democratic Unionist party Members that accountability is theirs. They have got it into their heads that it is not, and they will not be persuaded. We are doing all that we can to ensure that such accountability is provided for in the Bill, as far as it is congruent with the agreement. In addition, the Assembly has the matter in its own hands. By virtue of its Standing Orders and debates, it can ensure that such accountability is present. I see no problems with it.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down said that the provision will lead to a united Ireland and that it is all a slippery slope. Undoubtedly, a number of people in the Unionist community in Northern Ireland fear that. I think that they are misguided, because the whole basis of the agreement, for which people voted by a large majority, is consent. It is the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, within Northern Ireland, that will determine whether there is any such movement, not the provision under discussion. It will be decided not by the implementation bodies, or the North-South Ministerial Council, but by a vote of the people in Northern Ireland to decide what they want to do. That is the very bedrock of the agreement and that is why people in Northern Ireland, whether Unionist or nationalist, need not fear anything from the agreement or the Bill.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 106 to 108 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 109, after clause 43, to insert the following new clause—*Civic Forum*—

".—(1) The First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly shall make arrangements for obtaining from the Forum its views on social, economic and cultural matters.

(2) The arrangements so made shall not take effect until after they have been approved by the Assembly.

(3) The expenses of the Forum shall be defrayed as expenses of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

(4) In this section "the Forum" means the consultative Civic Forum established in pursuance of paragraph 34 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly."

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 157 and 380.

Mr. Murphy: Amendment No. 157 would delete the provisions on the civic forum from their current position in the Bill and amendment No. 109 amends them, moving them to a more prominent position.

The main differences with the new provisions are that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will now have a clear duty to establish the forum. The financial provisions have been tidied up and references to the forum representing the views of the community have been removed.

Amendment No. 380 is technical and would provide for any establishment of the civic forum during the shadow phase to carry forward after devolution.

Dr. Godman: I promise that I will be brief. I made an exceedingly brief speech earlier—I think that it lasted 60 seconds. I have spoken to representatives of voluntary organisations and trade unions, who believe that amendment No. 109 is a first-class initiative. I make the plea—I know that I do not have the support of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley)—that the forum be given adequate resources. My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned financial provisions, but I believe that anything less than £500,000 could mean that the forum was nothing more than a talking shop.

Mr. Robert McCartney: The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) would be unwise to think that only those who oppose the agreement have expressed doubts about the civic forum. Throughout Northern Ireland—I speak also for those beyond the Unionist community—there are grave reservations about it. It is thought that the forum may exercise the prerogative of the harlot—power without responsibility—and constitute itself as an upper chamber.

Given recent events, the powers of upper chambers may have some reverberations in this Chamber this evening, but the good government of Northern Ireland will not be served by the establishment of a civic forum that comprises a group of self-confessed lobbyists who have nothing to do other than to do dream up schemes—many of them far removed from reality—with which to carry out a process of self-publicity for various purposes.

There is room for a body that would draw up reports or take advice from a wide spectrum of society—even from members of the self-appointed G7, which includes the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland, some elements of the trade unions and one or two others. The Assembly could usefully consult such a body.

However, it would be totally inimical to the future good government of Northern Ireland if members of the forum were led to believe that they were constituted as an upper chamber, that they inhabited the environs of Stormont, that they were the touchy-feely conscience of the Assembly or that they were a moral mirror for the elected Members.

At some point, people have to govern. In a democracy, the people who govern are those who were elected; they are not some collection of polyglot do-gooders. I fear that, unless the civic forum is given a specific remit and unless the parameters of its activities are defined, it will turn itself into not an aid to the Assembly but a body that will generate irritation without forwarding the good government of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Robinson: It is important that we should know why the Bill contains provisions for a civic forum. During the negotiations, the participants were happily working and weaving the various levels of government into the proposed arrangements. They set up the Assembly, the ministerial structures and the committees.

After that, some parties froze—they went rigid. They went rigid because they—principally the Women's Coalition and the Ulster Democratic party—realised that there was a possibility that they might not have their day in the sun, so they devised this little initiative: a mechanism whereby political rejects could get in on the act.

To quote the Minister, any politician worth his or her salt should be in touch with all the interest groups in the day-to-day discharge of his or her duties. It is politicians' job to know what their constituency feels about the economy, culture or any other issue affecting the day-to-day life of the Assembly. The purpose of the civic forum was simply to provide jobs for the boys and, in this case, especially the girls.

The forum is no more than a talking shop: it has no executive function, and no function at all beyond giving an extremely limited range of people the chance to whisper in Assembly Members' ears their views on a limited range of issues. There is a clause that allows the forum to be expanded if the Assembly so wishes, but it is clear who the Government want to be in the forum. The groups that the Minister has outlined would certainly not be representative of the community as a whole. It would be vital for a body specifically charged with expressing views on a range of issues to be representative, but, unless there is a significant change, that will not be the case.

Wherever the forum meets, it should not do so in parliamentary buildings. It is vital that it should never be perceived as a second chamber of the Assembly. That was never intended to be its role, but, if it were to be housed in the Parliament buildings—in the Senate Chamber, for instance—there is absolutely no doubt how it would see itself and how others would see it. It must be kept as a body to be consulted on issues about which the Assembly specifically asks it for its views, and it should not generate its own agenda.

Rev. Ian Paisley: We discussed this at some length at earlier stages of the Bill. When the Minister met us, he was in no doubt about the position that those associated with me in the Assembly took. I know that others spoke to him who differ with me about the agreement but share my views on the civic forum. They agree that it should not be a colossal quango, priding itself on being the House of Lords in the new Assembly, keeping everybody right.

One of the leading proponents of the forum says that adequate money must be set aside to allow it to journey from place to place and meet in venues throughout the country. The forum will not be an elected body, because those who want to be on it are unelectable. They have tried and failed: some of them have changed parties and flown various flags of convenience, but they have still been rejected.

To my amazement, I read in the newspaper the other day that a candidate who was defeated in the Assembly elections demanded that a place be made for him because his contribution was so valuable that Northern Ireland could not succeed without him. The people did not think so—he put himself up to be elected, and the people defeated him. We are also told that the chairman of the new civic form is to be a person of great power, equal to the Speaker of the Assembly.

The time has come when the people should be told about the forum, whose membership is to be nominated by the First Minister and his deputy. I am glad that the Bill has retained the provision that the membership also has to be approved by the Assembly, because it means that the nominees will have to get the Assembly's vote. In addition, I believe that the Assembly will have some power, through the proposed commission to look after the property of Stormont, to prevent the forum from meeting in the Parliament buildings. I understand that the forum has said that the old forum building must be put at its disposal, but it might not be big enough for its members' offices.

We should be perfectly clear: if the people want the forum and if the Government want it, as they evidently do, its lines of operation should be clearly marked. It should not be allowed to damage the Assembly, or hinder the Assembly in the work that it was elected to do.

11 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy: The agreement referred to a consultative civic forum, and that is what it is. It is not an elected body, nor is it a rival to the Assembly, nor a second chamber. It is a civic forum, comprising, I should hope, people of a wide range of views, backgrounds and experiences in Northern Ireland. Some of those sectors—trade unionism, business and the voluntary sector—have been mentioned in the agreement, but other sectors may be included, as agreed by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and approved by the Assembly.

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

I believe that nothing but good can come of the forum. It is similar to the Economic and Social Council of the European Union. We have had inquiries from other parts of the country, including Wales, about how the forum might operate, but that is a matter for the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Members of the Assembly to determine. I am quite convinced that they will come up with the best ideas about how to form the body and what it should do. It will enhance, not replace, democracy in Northern Ireland.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 44

CONSOLIDATED FUND OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Lords amendment: No. 110, in page 23, line 15, after ("to") insert ("section 46 and to")

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 111 to 122 and 381.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments relate to the financial provisions contained in the Bill, and several reflect the undertaking I gave the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, to consider his proposals for expanding and improving the audit controls. I am indebted to the right hon. Gentleman for his thoughtful proposals, the bulk of which are now reflected in the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 110 to 117 are chiefly technical and drafting amendments, which clarify how the default provision will work. We introduced the provision to safeguard public services in the event of the Assembly's being unable to agree a budget or pass appropriation measures. Amendment No. 110 makes it clear that the default mechanism will begin to operate if the Assembly cannot agree on expenditure for the forthcoming financial year by three working days before the end of the current financial year. Amendments Nos. 114 and 116 clarify the upper limits on expenditure once the default mechanism has come into play: 75 per cent. of the previous year's total for expenditure on account, and 95 per cent. of the previous year's expenditure for a whole year in default of an appropriation measure.

The principal changes to the audit arrangements are in amendment No. 118, which sets out the basic audit provisions that all future Northern Ireland legislation is required to continue in operation. It is not possible for practical reasons to entrench existing audit legislation: the Assembly must be able to amend it from time to time because, for instance, Treasury requirements may change. In addition, it has been a transferred matter since 1921, and there is no justification for going against the Belfast agreement and reserving it now.

Nevertheless, the Assembly will be responsible for large amounts of public money, for which it must be fully and publicly accountable. It should not be free to abolish audit controls or so to dilute them that they become ineffective. I have to say that I have no fear at present that the Assembly will do any such thing, but the Scotland Bill constrains the Scottish Parliament from abolishing its controls, and a similar provision is justified for this Bill.

Amendment No. 118 will require future Northern Ireland legislation to provide, among other things, for proper accounts to be prepared in respect of payments in and out of the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund, for accounting officers to be designated in Northern Ireland Departments, and for accounts to be audited, certified, published and laid before the Assembly. It will also require the Assembly to establish the equivalent of the Public Accounts Committee in the House of Commons, with similar duties, and it will establish the independence of anyone other than the Comptroller and Auditor-General who is charged with the audit function, because a proportion of audit work is put out to private firms.

Amendment No. 119 will buttress the independence of the Comptroller and Auditor-General himself, and will prevent the Assembly from making a recommendation to the Queen for his removal from office, unless there is a vote in favour of so doing supported by two thirds of the total number of Assembly Members entitled to vote. Amendment No. 121 will ensure that the Assembly cannot manipulate him by reducing his salary. Amendment No. 122 will protect the independence of the Northern Ireland Audit Office by the establishment of a special Assembly Committee to examine its expenses, as the Public Accounts Commission does for the National Audit Office here.

Taken together, this package will ensure the integrity of the audit controls over public expenditure in Northern Ireland in the years to come. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden for drawing to my attention the desirability of replicating the Scotland Bill model as far as possible, and I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 111 to 122 agreed to.

Clause 54

THE COMMISSION'S FUNCTIONS

Lords amendment: No. 123, in page 26, line 3, at end insert—

("( ) The Commission shall, before the end of the period of two years beginning with the commencement of this section, make to the Secretary of State such recommendations as it thinks fit for improving—

(a) its effectiveness;

(b) the adequacy and effectiveness of the functions conferred on it by this Part; and

(c) the adequacy and effectiveness of the provisions of this Part relating to it.")

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 124 and 125, amendment (a) thereto and Lords amendments Nos. 126 to 136 and 277 to 280.

I must inform the House that Lords amendments Nos. 277 and 278 involve privilege.

Mr. Murphy: The Government received extensive representations on the Floor of the House and during the

summer months on the human rights issue, and we received many amendments to the Bill on that subject. We have introduced amendments of our own which meet many of the concerns that have been expressed.

A powerful case was made for an extension of the Human Rights Commission's functions and powers beyond what is currently provided for in the Bill. We have not closed our minds on that, and we therefore introduced amendment No. 123 to require the commission, no later than two years after its establishment, to review the adequacy of its powers.

Amendments Nos. 124 and 132 go together. Amendment No. 124 makes clear on the face of the Bill the ability of the Human Rights Commission to bring proceedings involving law or practice relating to the protection of human rights, but amendment No. 132 ensures that this provision does not override the need for a "victim" under the Human Rights Act 1998. In exercising its various functions as laid down in the clause, we would expect that a normal part of the way the commission operates will be to carry out investigations. Amendment No. 125 provides for that.

As my colleague Lord Williams of Mostyn explained in the other place, the Government will co-operate fully with any investigation undertaken by the commission. We shall provide it with any information and documents necessary to such an investigation, subject only to adequate arrangements being made to protect information where confidentiality is required, and to safeguard national security, public safety and public order.

Amendment No. 126 widens the ambit of clause 55 so that the commission will be able to assist persons in any proceedings which, in the view of the commission, involve either the law or practice relating to protection of human rights. Amendments Nos. 127 to 131 are technical improvements, which ensure that the Bill will allow the commission to assist "persons" rather than individuals, and that will allow the commission to assist incorporated bodies as well as individual people.

I have already mentioned amendment No. 132. Amendments Nos. 133 to 135 are technical amendments, which ensure that the Human Rights Commission can bring proceedings in cases involving non-European convention on human rights issues. Amendment No. 136 provides that the Advocate-General for Scotland is exempt from restrictions, as well as the other Law Officers listed.

There are four amendments to schedule 8. Amendments Nos. 277 and 278 are technical, and will make it possible for employment by the commission to fall within the terms of a superannuation scheme under the Superannuation Act 1972. Amendments Nos. 279 and 280 are simple drafting amendments that improve the consistency and comprehensiveness of the schedule.

There are also some issues relating to the Human Rights Commission on which we did not introduce amendments, but on which we believe that we should take the opportunity to clarify our position. We have been asked about the role of the commission as amicus curiae. Courts will be free to ask the commission to provide assistance as amicus under the normal rules that apply. However, that is not a matter for the Bill, but for the court in individual cases.

There has also been considerable debate on the commission's role in scrutinising draft legislation. Under clause 11, all Bills introduced in the Assembly will be sent to the commission as soon as is reasonably practicable after their introduction. That does not prevent the sponsors of legislation from involving the commission earlier, before a first draft of a Bill appears. Certainly the Government would expect to consult the commission at an early stage on any proposal for Westminster legislation that touched on human rights issues in Northern Ireland.

We have no reason to doubt that sponsors of Bills in the Assembly will do the same. Before draft legislation is introduced, its referral to the commission is not a matter for the Assembly, and the Bill clearly cannot regulate what the Assembly should do. I hope that that explanation answers most of the outstanding issues.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for much of what he has just said, and for his clarification of several issues. He has put the Government's intentions into *Hansard*, and the courts will therefore have to pay attention to them. However, I am concerned about several points.

First, the amendments will considerably extend the role and purpose of the commission. Will it have sufficient funds to carry out its functions? We have heard figures bandied about of less than £1 million, a sum that would not be sufficient to achieve a proper inquiry in some cases. What will be the financial restraints? Will the money come from the Treasury, or from the Northern Ireland grant, on which there are other pressures?

Secondly, I want to be sure that I correctly understood my hon. Friend's final point on Westminster legislation. The Belfast agreement said that the new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission would have

"an extended and enhanced role beyond that currently exercised by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, to include keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of laws and practices, making recommendations to Government as necessary".

My hon. Friend the Minister said that any proposed legislation affecting human rights and concerning Northern Ireland that passed through this House would go to the Human Rights Commission.

11.15 pm

I hope that I have understood that correctly, because, if that is the case, it would overcome some of the difficulties that have arisen in the statement of my noble Friend Lord Williams of Mostyn. He said of the proposal that Westminster legislation should go to the Human Rights Commission:

"We do not think that that is necessary because Westminster Bills will be subject to the regime proposed in the Human Rights Bill to ensure that Ministers consider their compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 October 1998; Vol. 594, c. 1536.]

Of course, it is possible that legislation emanating from Westminster and affecting Northern Ireland may be within the European convention on human rights, but not within human rights and other legislation as it is concerned with Northern Ireland and its Human Rights Commission.

I turn briefly to the amendment that has caused most concern, a matter on which I have the support of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) and, in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), who sadly is now in St. Thomas's hospital. I am sure that all my colleagues send him their good

[Mr. McNamara]

wishes, and hope that he will have a speedy recovery. Had he been here, he would have been vociferous on this amendment because of his concern for human rights in Northern Ireland and the amendment arising from the Tinnelly case, which, as he was quick to point out, had many of the aspects of exclusion orders.

The thrust of the amendment in my name to Lords amendment No. 125 seeks to strengthen the role of the Human Rights Commission. It provides that, when initiating an investigation, the commission can subpoena witnesses and demand the production of documents.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State failed to deal with that main issue. In correspondence with me, he said that the matter was not dealt with completely in the agreement. In fact, in the section entitled "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity", in paragraph 4, the agreement says:

"The new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission . . . will be invited to consult and advise on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplemental to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland"—

that is the first point, which my hon. Friend has dealt with—

"drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience."

The basic documents on international rights and experience are the Paris principles.

My hon. Friend will probably be aware of a letter sent on 18 June by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which he kindly placed in the Library. The High Commissioner, who one would think would have broad knowledge of these matters, says:

"While this responsibility does not generally require the relevant institutions"—

that is, human rights commissions—

"to make binding decisions (which for constitutional reasons are generally reserved to the courts) it is common practice to accord these Commissions powers to conduct investigations effectively by compelling the production of documents and the attendance of witnesses, if necessary. Such powers would, in my view, clearly be appropriate for the new institutions envisaged by the Multi-Party Agreement."

My hon. Friend and the parties to the agreement say that they will look for international standards. The minimum international standards are laid down in the Paris principles. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has written to the Prime Minister stating that the powers are minimum requirements, and that she would expect to see them in the agreement. My hon. Friend the Minister of State says that we cannot depart from the agreement, as there does not seem to be much agreement on the matter, but all the parties agreed on the minimum international standards, and the United Nations High Commissioner says that these are the minimum international standards.

We have been let down. I know that my hon. Friend said that, in two years, the Human Rights Commission can examine the situation, and may recommend those powers. I believe that provision for the powers is contained in the agreement as a minimum international standard. The High Commissioner agrees.

My hon. Friend states in correspondence with me that there is not sufficient consensus among the parties to the agreement. However, all the parties agreed to what was in the agreement. That is the first point. Secondly, which people have not come out in favour of it?

Sadly—perhaps because we are dealing with human rights—there are no hon. Members present from the Ulster Unionist party, the Democratic Unionist party or the United Kingdom Unionist party. I regret that. They should be present to answer these points. The Ulster Unionist party is the only party to the agreement that has not come out explicitly in favour of the commission having those powers, despite what is in the agreement. Even if the UUP is the only party to the agreement that is not involved, surely sufficient consensus does exist. Does that mean that the party has a veto on the issue?

The second point that I invite my hon. Friend to answer is why the Government took the position that the sufficient consensus rule applied when effective enforcement powers are required by the UN Paris principles, which they know were the minimum standards. I do not understand the Government's position. I welcome most of what my hon. Friend said about the improvement of the clauses, but the right of the Human Rights Commission to hold inquiries is fundamental.

I know that the Government will co-operate in every way, as they have said, subject to national security and so on. They will produce the documents and provide the information. If cases arise and the commission is involved under the rules of procedure, it can compel the discovery of documents and subpoena witnesses. I understand that as well.

However, with respect to the commission's power to hold inquiries, it is starting off in the knowledge that it cannot oblige people to attend and give evidence, or enforce the discovery of documents. It will be hampered from the outset, and people will be able to cock a snook at it. If, in two years, the commission begins an inquiry and decides that it needs the powers, the Government will say that legislation is necessary.

I can see no powers to make statutory orders to change the authority of the Human Rights Commission. If that is the case, we will be fighting for places on the statute book—unless the Assembly decides to introduce such provisions. However, that same negative force, the Ulster Unionist party, could prevent their introduction through Assembly legislation. That is why we have ring-fenced human rights legislation within Westminster: the Assembly will be at the beck and call of particular pressure groups not to get legislation on the statute book.

I urge my hon. Friend, even at this late stage, to consider carefully the contents of the Belfast agreement and Mary Robinson's letter, and to decide whether we want to hobble the Human Rights Commission in this way.

Mr. McGrady: I support the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). He has presented his detailed case with great clarity, and left nothing out of the argument on behalf of his amendment.

The establishment of the Human Rights Commission is extremely welcome and significant because it places human rights issues centre stage. That subject has been the cause of much conflict in Northern Ireland and the

Republic of Ireland. To his credit, I confess that the Minister has entered into much consultation about the Lords amendments, and has addressed many human rights issues that were raised in a debate in this place in the last few weeks of July.

Therefore, I shall confine myself to asking the Minister several questions to which I hope he will respond this evening. First, does the Minister accept that, by not granting the commission the power of discovery of documents and the power to compel witness attendance—as my hon. Friend pointed out—it will have fewer powers than are recommended in the United Nations Paris principles, which outline the good practice for national human rights institutions?

Secondly, does the Minister accept that the proposed powers are less than those granted to the health and safety bodies, for example, that are already extant in the north of Ireland? That is the situation under the legislation. Thirdly, does the Minister agree that it is desirable that the commission should enjoy the powers of discovery and compulsion in due course? If the commission requests those powers in the two-year review, will the Government respond positively?

Mr. Paul Murphy: My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) raised several points. He referred to the funding of the Human Rights Commission. We have in mind an indicative figure of £750,000 for the commission's annual budget. That figure will remain under review, and I assure my hon. Friend that the Government will ensure that the commission is properly funded to carry out its functions under the Bill, within the normal constraints of public expenditure control—to which we are all subject. I confirm that my hon. Friend's comments about Westminster legislation were accurate.

The main issue that both he and my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) raised related to the proposal to give the Human Rights Commission the power to compel the attendance of witnesses and the power of discovery of documents. That significant issue was discussed, not just in the House, but during the recess in several meetings with Members of Parliament, the Northern Ireland political parties, various interest groups and the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. Many people and institutions were involved in discussions about the matter.

We concluded, however, that, because that issue was not specifically referred to in the agreement, and because it was a significant issue in itself, we were not in a position to accede to including it in the Bill. There was not sufficient consensus as a result of the consultation processes to which I have referred.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Nevertheless, does the Minister agree that the arrangements, the provisions and the legislation to protect human rights in Northern Ireland are, at present, much better than the provisions for any other region of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Murphy: I am sure they are, and I sincerely hope that, as a consequence of the Bill, they will be even more so. I am convinced that the people who drew up the agreement, those of us who were in the talks and the people who voted on the agreement believe that the human rights provisions are an important aspect of it, as are the equality provisions.

Mr. McNamara: Can my hon. Friend say where we have drawn, as appropriate, on international instruments and experience, and what his reaction is to what the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights described as necessary attributes to the Bill?

11.15 pm

Mr. Murphy: I do not for one second underestimate the significance of the contributions made by international institutions on these matters. All I am saying is that, where the agreement is silent, it is incumbent on us to consult with all the political parties and Governments who were involved in the talks process, and to come to a conclusion about whether such a proposal would have achieved sufficient consensus had the talks continued. I cannot give an assurance to the House, however, because no such consensus emerged.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) quoted from the agreement referring specifically to paragraph 4 at page 17. That is clearly concerned with the commission's consideration of a future Bill of rights. I am absolutely clear that there is a great deal of merit in what my hon. Friend says, and in the representations that have been made to us. That is why the Government have not closed their mind to a review, after two years, if the Human Rights Commission tells us that it cannot do its work without those powers, or that it could do its work much more effectively if those powers were granted to it.

We do not know what the Human Rights Commission is likely to say in two years, any more than I know what the Government will say in response to the commission. All I am saying is that the opportunity exists, the door is not closed and the points have been well made.

Although we cannot incorporate a review into the Bill because there was insufficient consensus, I believe that much in the Bill that refers to human rights puts Northern Ireland on a much higher plane than all other parts of the United Kingdom and many other countries in Europe and the world. As a consequence, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North will not seek to move his amendment to amendment No. 125. We shall await developments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 124 to 136 agreed to.

Clause 58

THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Lords amendment: No. 137, in page 28, line 9, leave out ("members") and insert ("Commissioners").

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 138 to 143 and 281 to 323.

Mr. Murphy: This large group of amendments deals with equality. Like human rights, that is an important

[Mr. Murphy]

feature of the Belfast agreement, and has given rise to intensive debate and scrutiny at all stages of the Bill in the Commons and in the Lords. The amendments make the Bill more effective, and bring it more clearly into line with the agreement.

When the Bill was under discussion in this House, much attention was paid to the provisions that sought to create a new equality commission and a statutory obligation on the public sector to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. Since the summer, I have discussed those issues with hon. Members on both sides of the House and with all political parties that are represented in the Assembly. In addition, I have held discussions with SACHR, the chairs of existing equality bodies and, on several occasions, delegations from other bodies and trade unions.

Those discussions have been most productive. They have led to many Government amendments in the other place, which we now have to consider. The Government have shown themselves to be flexible in responding to constructive suggestions. We believe that the amendments greatly improve the equality of opportunity provisions, and we are grateful to all who have contributed to the consultative process.

Amendments to clauses 58 and schedule 10 amend the powers and procedures of the new unified equality commission. They also give persons serving on the commission the titles of chief commissioner, deputy chief commissioner and commissioner.

Amendments Nos. 291 and 292 will require a copy of the commission's annual report to be laid before Parliament as well as the Assembly. In addition, the report will have to give details of steps taken during the year by the commission and by other public authorities to promote equality of opportunity. The Government expect other public authorities to co-operate fully with the equality commission in the preparation of that aspect of the annual report, providing the necessary information on their compliance with the new statutory obligation.

I turn to the group of amendments on clause 60 and schedule 10, which deal with the equality of opportunity obligation. Although the principle of a statutory obligation was endorsed by the Good Friday agreement and has been widely accepted by non-governmental organisations, trade unions and others in Northern Ireland, there has been considerable debate about the detail of the proposal; it was the subject of much discussion in Committee. I gave undertakings to consider a number of issues that had been raised and particularly to see whether the Bill could take on board the substantive points of the two new clauses that had been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North and other hon. Members.

There has been much consultation on those matters during recent months. The amendments to clause 60 and schedule 10 that were passed by the other place reflect the outcome of that consultation, providing for much more detail in equality schemes about arrangements for assessing and consulting on the impact of policies. In making decisions on policies, such assessments and consultation must be taken into account. Five-yearly reviews of equality schemes will be required. These amendments integrate the substance of the Committee stage new clauses 4 and 5 that we considered earlier in the year.

Amendments Nos. 141 to 143 to clause 60 substitute a new definition of "public authority" for purposes of the clause. They make it clear that the statutory obligation is not confined to Northern Ireland public authorities, but can also include UK Departments such as the Northern Ireland Office, and UK-wide public authorities that carry out functions relating to Northern Ireland.

Amendments Nos. 305 and 306 directly impose a requirement on public authorities, whether they exist now or come into being in the future, to prepare equality schemes. In Committee, it had been argued that the initial request from the commission to prepare a scheme was not fully consistent with the agreement. That issue has now been addressed.

Apart from equality schemes, the other main aspect of schedule 10 is the arrangement whereby the commission can challenge a public authority's equality scheme and investigate complaints. Amendments Nos. 316, 318 and 322 require the Assembly to be notified at relevant stages of that process. Amendment No. 323 creates a special procedure for dealing with problematic schemes and complaints where they concern the Northern Ireland Office and other UK Government Departments. That is to avoid a situation where the Secretary of State must reach a decision or issue a direction in a case involving her Department or that of a Cabinet colleague.

Those are the significant amendments relating to clause 60 and schedule 10. We believe they have greatly improved the Bill and will impose significant obligations on the public sector in Northern Ireland, with real change in the culture of administration.

Mr. McNamara: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the progress that has been made. He has gone as far as possible towards meeting the points that we made in Committee, and those made in another place. However, I should like him to confirm a couple of small points.

Where the commission still has power to make exemptions in regard to schemes, will the exemptions apply only when the body that is expected to produce a scheme is part of, or a subsidiary of, a larger body that will produce a scheme covering the subsidiary? I am thinking of, for example, a local authority and a committee, or sub-committee, of that authority. Will the only other exemption—in terms of public authorities—relate to notional circumstances in which a United Kingdom Department would be active in Northern Ireland, but the range and scope of its activity would be so small as to be negligible? Are those the only exemptions that my hon. Friend envisages?

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his courtesy in listening to what we have said about the amendments that we tabled in Committee, and for the consultation in which he has engaged. I feel that the amendments bring the Bill into line with the Belfast agreement.

For the record, may I ask my hon. Friend to confirm what was said by Lord Dubs in another place? Lord Dubs said:

"To clarify the position, it is the Government's intention that impact assessments"

under schedule 10

"should relate to the whole range of a public authority's policy",

not just to

"policies aimed at promoting equality of opportunity."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 11 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 810.]

Lord Dubs also said that, in the Government's view, nothing in the Bill

"renders unlawful what would be lawful affirmative action under the existing fair employment, equal opportunities and race relations law . . . The justification for affirmative actions is that they are necessary to correct existing disadvantage or imbalance in equality of opportunity."

Lord Dubs added that the Government were confident that the clauses did not hinder affirmative actions when they were

"properly directed at promoting equality of opportunity."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 713.]

It would be helpful to have that on the record.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): It is welcome that, during the recess, the Minister was prepared to meet and consult many bodies that are involved in the equality issue. Will he tell us, however, whether all the bodies that will be dissolved under the legislation—the Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland, the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, the Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Disability Council—are content with the proposals in the Lords amendments? Have all, or some, of those bodies some reservations? Do they feel that the Government's proposals will not achieve their ends?

Will the Minister confirm that working groups will be involved? If so, it would be helpful to know when those groups are expected to report to the Government, and whether the Minister envisages further change as a result of their activities.

Mr. Paul Murphy: My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) referred to questions that he had raised about the exemption of public authorities from the requirement to prepare schemes. We intend the exemption to be used only in rare circumstances—for instance, when public authorities' activities in Northern Ireland are minimal, and the effort involved in preparing the scheme involved, and having it validated by the commission, would be disproportionate. In other circumstances, it might make sense to exempt a public authority. For instance, all sub-committees of district councils are defined as public authorities. Provided that their activities were fully covered by district councils' own equality schemes, an exemption could avoid each sub-committee having to draw up its own scheme.

11.45 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) mentioned affirmative action. Clause 60 in no way calls into question the ability of public authorities to take affirmative action in appropriate cases to correct disadvantage. Affirmative action in appropriate circumstances is an important method of combating inequality, and it is our firm intention that that should remain so. The clause does not call that into question, and does not render unlawful what would be lawful affirmative action under current anti-discrimination legislation.

Furthermore, clause 60 means that public authorities are bound to have regard to the need for affirmative action when considering their duty under the clause. An exemption for affirmative action is therefore unnecessary.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) mentioned the current status of the equality commission. As he knows, the four separate commissions in Northern Ireland—dealing with disability, fair employment, gender and race—have expressed various concerns about the future nature of the structures. Nevertheless—to be fair—the fair employment commission believed that the proposals provide the best option.

We received many representations from the bodies, and on a number of occasions I have met the chairs of all four commissions. The chairs, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have agreed that an independent chair—Dr. Stringer, from Edinburgh—should be appointed. In the next couple of months, Dr. Stringer will go and work with the four commission chairs, examine the structures that we have to deal with and devise the best possible structure—which will be one that is accepted by all the commissions and by the wider community in Northern Ireland. The proposal seems now to be generally accepted by the commissions. I look forward to the report, which I hope will be available fairly speedily.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 138 to 143 agreed to.

Clause 61

DISCRIMINATION BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Lords amendment: No. 144, in page 29, line 27, leave out ("discharging") and insert ("carrying out")

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 145 to 156 and 385.

Mr. Murphy: Lords amendments Nos. 144 to 149 relate to clause 61, which prevents discrimination by public authorities on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion. They are all technical amendments that improve the comprehensiveness and consistency of the clause's provisions.

The group of six amendments—Lords amendments Nos. 150 to 155—all relate to clause 62, which prevents organisations from requiring individuals to make certain oaths and declarations. They, too, are all simple, technical and drafting amendments.

Lords amendment No. 156 relates to clause 63, and slightly increases the circumstances in which restrictions or investigations into complaints should not apply. The restrictions will, as a consequence of the amendment,

[Mr. Murphy]

not apply to investigations into the aiding and inciting of discrimination and will not apply to investigations into discrimination itself.

Lords amendment No. 385 is a technical amendment to schedule 14.

In moving the Lords amendments, I should like to commend the organisations and parties that have in the past few months been consulted by the Government and had many discussions and negotiations with me and my ministerial colleagues. They have very positively helped to strengthen the Bill.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 145 to 160 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 161, after clause 68, to insert the following new clause—*Legislative power to remedy ultra vires acts*—

".—(1) The Secretary of State may by order make such provision as he considers necessary or expedient in consequence of—

(a) any provision of an Act of the Assembly which is not, or may not be, within the legislative competence of the Assembly; or

(b) any purported exercise by a Minister or Northern Ireland department of his or its functions which is not, or may not be, a valid exercise of those functions.

(2) An order under this section may—

(a) make provision having retrospective effect;

(b) make consequential or supplementary provision, including provision amending or repealing any Northern Ireland legislation, or any instrument made under such legislation;

(c) make transitional or saving provision."

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 167 to 177 and 201 to 204.

Mr. Ingram: The amendments concern delegated powers. Most of them are technical. However, amendment No. 171 deals with a provision that has caused some concern and considerable debate. The issue has been raised in earlier debates.

Old clause 71, drawing on the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973, permitted orders in council to make provision about any reserved matter. We have re-examined the issue, taking into account the views expressed by various parties, and come to the conclusion that there is still a need to retain some of those powers. However, we have taken into account the views expressed and have cut back the matters that can be covered and introduced a consultation mechanism by which the views of the Assembly can also be taken into account. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Öpik: Amendment No. 169 refers to deleting the phrase "United Kingdom". That is not a great problem, but there is still an inconsistency in some places about how Ireland is referred to. That has caused problems in the past. In one notorious legal case—Ellis *v.* O'Dea—papers demanding the extradition of an Irish suspect to the UK were turned down on appeal in the Dublin courthouse because they referred to the Republic of Ireland rather than Ireland. We must be meticulous in ensuring that the phrases that we use are consistent.

Mr. McNamara: Will my hon. Friend give an undertaking that orders in council that might be forthcoming on fair employment will not be implemented until the Assembly has had an opportunity to look at them?

Mr. Ingram: There is no inconsistency on the point made by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik). We refer to the Government of Ireland, except when the word "Republic" is required for clarity. The parliamentary draftsmen have been precise, and are conscious of the problem.

Any matters that remain to be dealt with before the Assembly comes into place will need to be proceeded with. The Government still have important issues to deal with. We have to proceed as best we can on the present basis before the full Assembly is up and running. The Government intend to legislate on fair employment before devolution is fully in place.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 69

POWERS OF COURTS OR TRIBUNALS TO VARY RETROSPECTIVE DECISIONS

Lords amendment: No. 162, in page 33, line 32, leave out from second ("to") to end of line 36 and insert—

("(a) the Attorney General for Northern Ireland; and

(b) where the decision mentioned in subsection (1) relates to a devolution issue (within the meaning of Schedule 11), the appropriate authority,

unless the person to whom the notice would be given is a party to the proceedings.

(5) A person to whom notice is given under subsection (4) or, where such notice is given to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, those Ministers acting jointly")

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 163 to 166, 324 to 347 and 383. I must inform the House that Lords amendment No. 347 involves privilege.

Mr. Ingram: The amendments relate to judicial proceedings. We have provided rights for the devolved authorities to be represented on devolution issues under schedule 11, in consideration of the powers of the courts to vary retrospective decisions under clause 69. We have also added to the list of devolution issues so that all questions appropriate for this special procedure are covered. There is a clause to guide the courts in the interpretation of Assembly Bills. I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 163 to 177 agreed to.

Clause 73

CONSULTATION AND CO-ORDINATION

Lords amendment: No. 178, in page 36, line 24, leave out

("and for making any necessary financial adjustments")

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 179 to 192, 196 to 200, 205 to 221, 349 to 363, 365 to 372, 378, 379, 384 and 386 to 417.

Mr. Ingram: I do not intend to deal specifically with all the amendments, but the group features many miscellaneous provisions, several consequential on changes of substance earlier in the Bill. They include further provision to permit proper co-ordination between the social security systems in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, several additions to the list of provisions to commence on the passing of the Bill, further guidance on interpretation, and a range of consequential changes to existing legislation, resulting from the Bill's main provisions. I commend all the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 179 to 192 agreed to .

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 193, after clause 74, to insert the following new clause—*("Discrimination: certificates by Secretary of State—*

.—(1) This section applies where in any proceedings—

(a) a person claims that an act discriminated against him in contravention of section 19 or 61; and

(b) the person against whom the claim is made proposes to rely on a certificate purporting to be signed by or on behalf of the Secretary of State and certifying—

(i) that an act specified in the certificate was done for the purpose of safeguarding national security or protecting public safety or public order; and

(ii) that the doing of the act was justified by that purpose.

(2) The claimant may, in accordance with rules made by the Lord Chancellor, appeal against the certificate to the Tribunal, that is to say, the tribunal established under section (*The Tribunal*)").

(3) If on an appeal under subsection (2) the Tribunal determines—

(a) that the act specified in the certificate was done for the certified purpose; and

(b) that the doing of the act was justified by that purpose,

the Tribunal shall uphold the certificate; in any other case, the Tribunal shall quash the certificate.

(4) If—

(a) the claimant does not appeal against the certificate; or

(b) the certificate is upheld on appeal,

the certificate shall be conclusive evidence of the matters certified by it.

(5) In this section "act" does not include the making, confirmation or approval of a provision of subordinate legislation.")

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 194, amendment (a) thereto and Lords amendments Nos. 195, 348 and 382. Lords amendments Nos. 194 and 348 involve privilege.

Mr. Ingram: The amendments establish a new tribunal to which an individual can appeal if the Secretary of State issues a national security, public safety or public order certificate. The provisions were introduced during the Lords stages, so I hope that hon. Members will not mind if I spend a little time explaining their background and purpose. That will also set the context for dealing with the views likely to be expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) about the amendment that he has tabled to amendment. No. 194.

The tribunal originates from the European Court of Human Rights ruling this summer in the Tinnelly and McElduff cases. In that ruling, the United Kingdom was found to be in breach of article 6 of the convention because no right of appeal exists against certificates issued under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland Act) 1976.

The Government recognised that the certification powers in the Bill, which restate the long-standing powers in section 23 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973, were deficient in the light of that ruling. The new tribunal is intended to ensure compliance with the European Court of Human Rights, and to fulfil the agreement commitment to review the national security certification powers. We also gave a commitment on Second Reading, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North, to consider these powers in the light of the ECHR ruling.

The tribunal established by amendments Nos. 193 and 194 represents a major step forward in providing a mechanism through which an individual can challenge a certificate. Amendment No. 193 introduces a new test: not only will the tribunal consider whether an act was undertaken for the reasons stated in the certificate, it will also consider whether the act was justified. Those are important new safeguards for the individual.

Other considerations also apply, however, and must be given due weight. Safeguarding national security is a primary function of all Governments, and we continue to believe that it is essential to protect the intelligence information that gave rise to the original act and, ultimately, to the certificate.

At the same time, we fully accept the need to provide a mechanism through which an individual can challenge a certificate. That remains, and will continue to be, a question of balance. It is a difficult one, but I believe that we have got it right. Indeed, the Court noted in its ruling: "it should be possible to modify judicial procedures in such a way as to safeguard national security concerns about the nature and sources of intelligence information and yet accord the individual a substantial degree of procedural justice."

The Government believe that we have achieved precisely that balance in establishing the new tribunal. Amendment No. 348 specifically provides that the tribunal will be chaired by an individual holding high judicial office.

The key to achieving the balance appears in proposed subsection (7) in amendment 194, which enables the Attorney-General to appoint a special advocate to represent the interests of the appellant. That will ensure that the appellant will be represented fully by a suitably qualified person. However, we cannot provide the appellant with access to what might be extremely sensitive intelligence information or to any part of the proceedings under examination by the tribunal. We were not required to do so by the European Court of Human Rights ruling.

The Government fully recognise that the special advocate provisions are unusual, in that they modify the arrangements one would normally expect to see in appeals

[Mr. Ingram]

proceedings. However, these arrangements will play an important role in safeguarding national security and they do have a precedent—they are based directly on the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, similarly established following a European Court of Human Rights ruling and approved by this House in 1997.

12 midnight

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North has tabled an amendment to remove the provision that, while the special advocate will represent the appellant, he will not be responsible to him. That provision is also based directly on the SIAC, and it might be helpful if I explained briefly why it is necessary.

The special advocate will not be able to take instructions from the appellant in the normal way, because he will have access to information which he cannot share or discuss. It would be wrong, therefore, to impose on the advocate the normal responsibilities one would find in a client-lawyer relationship. The provision reflects the relationship between the advocate and the appellant, but does so in the context that the advocate is required to represent him. I have no doubt that the appellant's case will be argued to the full.

This important provision follows logically from the special advocate arrangements, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North will give further consideration to the point. I am sure that we will debate the matter in the time available.

I trust that the House will welcome the establishment of the tribunal. I do know that some hon. Members were concerned about whether the provisions provided sufficient safeguards for individuals. However, I hope that the House will agree that special arrangements—which are based directly on existing statutory provisions—are essential to safeguard national security, and that the balance we have aimed for has been achieved in the amendments, which, again, I commend to the House.

Mr. McNamara: I shall be very quick, because others want to get in. Does the House think that it is fair that a tribunal can take place without the applicant who has suffered a wrong having knowledge of the evidence which is being used against him; that part of it may be held in secret without him or his lawyer being present; that the tribunal, at best, need give him only a summary of what has been said; and that the proceedings may be held in his absence?

What does the House think of a prosecutor, the Attorney-General, appointing a barrister to represent the accused—who is called the appellant or respondent in this case—who has no responsibility to that person at all; who will argue a case in the absence of the accused; who will not be able to make any judgment whatever about the way in which the case has been handled; and who is chosen from a panel picked by his accusers? That cannot be right and fair in any way.

My amendment relates to the part of the Lords amendment No. 194 which says that a person appointed to represent the appellant

"shall be a member of the Bar of Northern Ireland . . . shall not be responsible to the party whose interests he represents."

Therefore, I want to know what reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sent to the chairman of the Bar Council, because this issue is important to its members. In his letter, the chairman said:

"We have just become aware of the proposed procedure in the Government amendments to the Northern Ireland Bill—National Security Certificates whereby the Attorney General for Northern Ireland may appoint a person to represent the interests of a party to proceedings before the Tribunal in any proceedings from which he and any legal representative of his are excluded. It is proposed that the person appointed shall be a member of the Bar of Northern Ireland and shall not"—

not is underlined—

"be responsible to the party whose interests he represents."

He continues:

"It is our preliminary view that such a procedure may put the barrister appointed in an impossible situation. By virtue of our Code of Conduct a barrister has certain obligations with which he must comply and we believe it may be impossible for him to discharge some under the above-mentioned procedure.

Accordingly we consider it important that we have the opportunity to discuss and respond to the proposal and we ask you to note our said interest. We await hearing from you as soon as possible."

I tabled a question asking what reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sent, but have not yet received a reply. I did not know about the original letter until last Thursday or Friday.

We are talking about a case in which one does not know the evidence against one, one cannot be told it and one cannot be fully represented. One could lose one's livelihood. What is more, one's character is besmirched. In principle, that is as bad as the old exclusion order. It is dressed up and jazzed up, but at the end of the day one just does not know. However, we do know of the malicious way in which those orders have been used in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) seemed to be rising, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I assumed that he wanted to speak.

Mr. Robert McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: However, I will not give way, because I have not yet said anything. I was trying to be gracious to the hon. and learned Gentleman in the time available. My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) raised a number of issues, with which I shall try to deal. No doubt the hon. and learned Member for North Down may get a chance to intervene.

On the rights of the individual relative to the rights of the rest of society, we are setting up the tribunal to protect the rights of the individual. However, sensitive intelligence information is gathered by brave men and women who put their lives on the line daily and who are unseen, unheard and in many ways unapplauded because of the nature of their jobs—trying to ensure that those who carry out extreme, or potentially extreme, actions against the state are made known to the authorities. Therefore, when sensitive information is involved, it must be protected, because, by exposing it, we may be exposing the people who have gathered it on behalf of the rest of us.

We have taken account of the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights and put in place precisely our interpretation of it. We have also put in place mechanisms

to defend the interests of the individual. So the individual's rights are indeed protected, and I entirely refute the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North presented his arguments.

We have dealt with the matter in the right way—right in the interests of the whole of society. We have also achieved the best protection of the rights of the individual that was possible. My hon. Friend also referred to the Bar Council of Northern Ireland. He may not be aware of this, but discussions have been taking place between the council and the Attorney-General. This evening, the Bar Council met and formed a sub-committee to look into the matter in greater detail. It has been charged with reporting to the council within one week. Clearly, we are at the final point—we are moving towards the passage of this legislation. We shall take account of the sub-committee's report to the Government, as members of the Bar will be asked to represent the interests of the individuals concerned.

Mr. Robert McCartney: The point that the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is making is that a balance must be struck between the conflicting interests of the state and the individual. I appreciate that the Minister has gone some way towards meeting European human rights criteria by appointing a barrister to look after the individual's rights and make representations. Presumably the barrister will see the reasons for granting the certificate, but why should he, without revealing the contents of the certificate, be prevented from taking detailed instructions from his client so that he can fully represent that client's interests? I do not believe that the barrister can fully represent his client unless he knows both the client's case and the contents of the certificate.

Mr. Ingram: Unlike the hon. and learned Gentleman, I am not a lawyer. As I understand the client-lawyer relationship, it would restrict the lawyer if we were to proceed as the hon. and learned Gentleman suggests—the lawyer would be in receipt of information that he could not impart to the client or appellant.

The Bar Council in England has also had to consider those matters, although in relation to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission. I understand that a SIAC case in which the issue will be tested is pending. We shall clearly have to consider whether the measure is robust and strikes a balance between the interests of appellants and of national security.

I take note of what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said and I am sure that the Bar Council of Northern Ireland, in which he takes an interest, will make its representations known through its sub-committee—its concerns will then be subject to further discussion and consultation with the Attorney-General. We are conscious of the difficulties, but we must protect both the national interest and the interest of the appellant.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 194 to 417 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Registration of Political Parties Bill

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I have to acquaint the House with a message that has been received from the Lords, as follows. The Lords have agreed to the Registration of Political Parties Bill with amendments, to which they desire the agreement of the House. The text of the Lords amendments is available in the Vote Office, as is a separate paper containing the grouping to be proposed by the Member in charge of the Bill.

Ordered,

That the Lords amendments to the Registration of Political Parties Bill be considered forthwith.—[*Mr. Betts.*]

Lords amendments accordingly considered.

Clause 5

EMBLEMS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, line 18, leave out ("an emblem" and insert ("up to three emblems").

12.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 7.

Mr. Howarth: The principal purpose of the registration scheme for political parties is to facilitate the running of the new systems for election to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and, we hope, the European Parliament.

The Bill also addresses the problem of misleading candidates' descriptions. That is in part achieved by the introduction of party emblems on the ballot paper. When introduced, the Bill provided that a party could register one emblem, reflecting what we believed to be the position at that time: that all the main political parties used only one emblem. During consideration of the Bill in the other place, the Conservative Party realised, first, that the party in Scotland had a separate emblem and, a few days later, that the party in Wales also had its own emblem.

The amendments address that problem by providing that a party may register up to three emblems. It will be up to each party to determine whether it wants to register an emblem and, if so, whether it registers one, two or three. A candidate from a party that has more than one emblem registered may, however, use only one of them against his or her name on a ballot paper. This modest change will afford some welcome flexibility not only to the Conservative party but to all registered parties. I therefore commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): After a five-hour interlude, we are back to electoral matters. This is likely to be the final debate in this long Session, but the nature and subject of the amendments is typical of so much that has gone before. We are being asked to examine and approve details of the Government's constitutional reforms that were clearly overlooked in the original

[Mr. John Greenway]

drafting, involving amendments made only this afternoon in another place and an amendment to an amendment passed only on 12 November. There has been no opportunity for anyone to study the *Hansard* report of the arguments. How could anyone have been aware that we were to consider the Bill tonight, when it was not even on the Order Paper?

The Minister knows that I am charitable, and I do not hold him personally responsible—we have enjoyed working together over the past 18 months on many pieces of legislation, and Conservative Members are grateful for the amendments, which we support—but he will also know that we did not approve of having emblems on ballot papers. Why include emblems when we have managed so long without them? It is becoming increasingly clear that, under the Labour Government, voting for a party is more important than voting for a candidate.

It is clear, as it should have been clear to the Government, that the need for a Bill to register political parties has been prompted by the fact that people will vote for parties in elections for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly; therefore it ought to have been obvious that there would be a requirement for more than three emblems. We objected to emblems and would prefer that no emblems were used, but if the Government want emblems, there ought to be more than three. I am surprised that it was not thought of earlier.

We agree with the amendment and are grateful to the Minister and to Lord Williams of Mostyn for the courtesy that they have shown. We feel that sufficient damage has been done to the Government's credibility as regards electoral reform proposals for one day to enable us to accept the amendment, even at this late hour.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I shall not delay the House by entering into a debate about who should or should not determine the electoral systems that face the people of this country, but it is important that I register the Liberal Democrats' support for the amendment, which is one that we proposed at various stages during the Bill's passage. It is welcome, because it will allow parties in the constituent parts of Great Britain to register their own emblems in their own right, as Scottish, Welsh or English parties. On that basis, we fully support the Government, who have listened to the representations that were made. Having offered our support and registered it in the *Official Report*, I shall not detain the House any longer.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 8 agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

EDUCATION

That the draft Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations 1998, which were laid before this House on 21st October, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security (New Deal Pilot) Regulations 1998, which were laid before this House on 29th October, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1998, which were laid before this House on 4th November, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance Amendment (New Deal) Regulations 1998, which were laid before this House on 4th November, be approved.

SUPREME COURT OF ENGLAND AND WALES

That the draft Civil Procedure (Modification of Enactments) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 5th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Question agreed to.

Intermediate Health Care (North Norfolk)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

12.22 am

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): I am pleased to have secured this vital debate on the future of intermediate care in north Norfolk. The issues raised will resonate in many other rural areas. I shall focus especially on the services provided by our community and cottage hospitals, which include rehabilitation. The debate builds on my Rural and Community Hospitals Bill, which I presented to the House last May, but which fell because of lack of parliamentary time.

In July 1998, the East Norfolk health authority produced for consultation a draft strategy document on intermediate services. The consultation period finished in October and the final decisions are promised next week, on 25 November. I want to use the debate to highlight my great concern about the effects of the health authority's proposed strategy on my constituency. The strategy implies the closure of several hospitals and I hope to elicit the Government's support in preventing any such closures. I think that the views I express are cross-party views in Norfolk, and I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) present in the Chamber at such a late hour, although I sadly note the absence of any Liberal Democrat Members.

There are four community hospitals in North Norfolk, covered by the shadow primary care group North Norfolk Health. They are Benjamin Court in Cromer, Cranmer House in Fakenham, Kelling hospital outside Holt and the Wells cottage hospital. In total, they provide 95 community beds, but the health authority proposes a staggering reduction in that number, to between 16 and 21 beds—a reduction of 80 per cent. Most incredibly, Benjamin Court is to be reduced from 36 beds to none. Benjamin Court, I should add, is almost brand new. That reduction, if implemented, would undermine the viability of Wells, Cranmer House and Benjamin Court. The most likely survivor is Kelling, for which the health authority suggest a much reduced requirement for 12 to 15 beds. That is ironic, because only two years ago Kelling was the hospital that the health authority was most determined to close. So much for consistency.

Are the health authority's forecasts for bed requirements right? Let us consider in contrast the views of North Norfolk Health, the primary care group. North Norfolk Health comprises 34 general practitioners in eight practices, covering 62,000 patients. Its assessment is that it needs not 16 to 21 beds, as the health authority suggests, but 65 to 75 beds. It believes that the health authority should do all it can to keep the cottage hospitals open in North Norfolk. North Norfolk Health's assessment calls for nearly five times the number of beds proposed by the health authority. In the case of Benjamin Court, North Norfolk Health see a minimum need of at least 23 beds, but the health authority see a demand for none.

Those discrepancies are massive and raise grave questions about the health authority's strategy. It is not good enough for the health authority to state:

"Further analysis work will be undertaken with local primary care groups at the implementation stage."

It will be too late by then.

Because of the discrepancies, the health authority, in October, belatedly and after the end of the consultation exercise, felt obliged to have an independent review of bed requirements by a consultancy firm called RKW. One might feel that that was rather late in the day, rather rushed and somewhat less than satisfactory. Personally, I am wholly underwhelmed by the review, not least because it provided no figures for north Norfolk, only for Norfolk as a whole; yet north Norfolk is a special case and different, because it has more existing community hospitals, more elderly people and, because it is so rural, suffers from public transport problems.

RKW came up with a range of community bed requirements for Norfolk of between 176 and 234. The higher end of the range is some 50 beds more than proposed by the health authority. When RKW announced its findings, it was accompanied by a great flash of intellectual brilliance when a spokesman for the company said, with no obvious irony:

"We are not able to predict what will happen in the future."

Quite. No one knows how many community beds will be needed in the future, and we do not need an expert to tell us that. It would be absurd to make any decisions based on the figures so far presented. If any of those figures are reliable, I would put my money on those from North Norfolk Health, because it is closer to the patients and their clinical requirements.

The shambles over community bed numbers is matched by that over rehabilitation bed numbers. The health authority proposes 124 rehabilitation beds for Norfolk, excluding Great Yarmouth. By contrast, the department for medicine for the elderly based at the Norfolk and Norwich hospital believes that 180 beds will be needed—some 56 more. Moreover, RKW has produced another set of numbers which is nearly 50 per cent. higher than the health authority's number, and much closer to the number suggested by the department of medicine for the elderly. The same uncertainty that surrounds community beds also surrounds rehabilitation beds. Which figures are right? Evidently, no real science is involved.

RKW believes that, overall for Norfolk, as many as 416 community and rehabilitation beds may be needed, whereas the health authority thinks that only 316 beds are needed. Decisions about the future of our hospitals must not be taken on the basis of such uncertainty, not least because such decisions are irreversible.

Moreover, a number of other hugely significant factors, some of which are peculiar to Norfolk, also militate against taking any major decision on the basis of the health authority's strategy. First, North Norfolk Health will cease to be a shadow primary care group on 1 April next year when it will come into real existence with real powers. As stated in the Government's 1997 White Paper, the primary care groups

"understand patient needs and they deliver local services. That is why they will be in the driving seat in shaping local services."

North Norfolk Health has made it clear that it wants to retain the community hospitals, and to use their beds. It cannot be right that the health authority should, only four months before the PCG starts, pre-empt that view on such a critical issue.

[Mr. David Prior]

Secondly, the Minister will be aware that a new hospital is currently under construction to replace the Norfolk and Norwich hospital and the West Norwich hospital. The number of beds in the acute hospital will reduce from 1,037 to 809, a reduction of 228. There is already much local concern about that reduction, and it is aggravated by the suspicion that there is already pressure on the Norfolk and Norwich to discharge patients early to cut waiting lists. Many general practitioners in Norfolk talk openly about a revolving door syndrome, by which, to reduce waiting lists, patients are discharged from the acute Norfolk and Norwich hospital too early, only to be readmitted later.

With fewer beds in the new hospital, there will be added dangers of bed blocking and of rising waiting lists if there are too few community and rehabilitation beds. That concern has been highlighted both by Dr. Coni, a retired geriatrician from Addenbrooke's hospital, who has conducted independent clinical research on the health authority's behalf, and by the department of medicine for the elderly. In its submission to the health authority, that department said:

"The proposed reduction in rehab and community beds will lead to a large number of patients waiting in the acute hospital for intermediate care, which will in turn seriously affect the acute hospital's ability to meet its waiting list targets for elective surgery . . . Without adequate intermediate services the ability of the acute hospital to function effectively will be seriously compromised . . . Quite clearly the access to intermediate services in community hospitals is of crucial importance to the acute hospital."

Too great a reduction in community hospital beds could undermine the effectiveness of the new hospital and increase waiting lists. That risk cannot be worth taking. We must have some insurance in the system.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Will the hon. Gentleman say something about alternative suggestions, and about the report into travel times from his constituency to the new facilities? Will there be a major problem with the travel facilities? Will he comment on the conditions in the new facilities?

Mr. Prior: Perhaps I can return to those points a little later.

The third factor I want to mention is the direct relationship between intermediate care and social services. Despite the eligibility criteria, it is right for patients to stay longer in hospital if there are no proper and adequate social services back-ups in the community. This year, Norfolk county council has had to reduce social service spending by more than £4 million, and a similar saving has been identified for next year. Until the Government are prepared to recognise the extra costs of delivering social services in rural areas and to an elderly population, the squeeze will continue.

The independent RKW research assumes that increased social service provision will reduce the need for 21 beds in Norfolk, and that a further 58 beds could be dispensed with because the length of stay in a bed will decrease. Both assumptions are highly suspect. My gut feeling is that, far from there being a reduction in the demand for beds, we may need to increase their number simply to compensate for fewer resources being available from social services.

The fourth factor is that the Secretary of State announced on 30 September a national inquiry into hospital beds because, as he said:

"It became clear last winter that in some parts of the country the scale of closures had gone too far."

That inquiry is due to report next spring. It may produce useful methodology, guidelines, evidence and ideas. It should not be pre-empted.

Finally, in 1999, the royal commission on the long-term care of the elderly will report. It will have something to say about the eligibility criteria for NHS beds and about the overlap between the NHS and the private sector. It may even suggest ways—I hope it does—of attracting private money into supporting community hospitals. The royal commission's terms of reference specifically include considering the options for funding long-term care for elderly people in their own homes and other settings. That review, which will have taken two years of exhaustive research, also should not be pre-empted.

The confusion and uncertainty over bed numbers, the impossibility of seeing clearly into the future and the particular uncertainties facing Norfolk at this time argue strongly for no precipitate, radical change now; yet the health authority's strategy reveals that its goal is clearly revolutionary change. I shall quote a few extracts from that document, which will give a flavour of it. It says:

"This is a plan for change. It is a far-reaching plan . . . Change is needed . . . Older style community hospitals will close."

The most hackneyed and meaningless soundbite of all says:

"We need to make some fundamental changes if we are to develop health services fit for the next millennium."

That is cool Britannia-speak, not a cool, clinical assessment.

A further, overpowering reason against radical change is the public's overwhelming support for our community hospitals. Their support is based on their personal experience of the quality of care received by patients, relatives and friends and the fact that it is delivered locally, and it is manifested by massive voluntary financial support and a huge number of volunteer visitors.

The community hospitals are part of our local fabric in North Norfolk. We are not starting with a clean piece of paper, however much the health authority would like that. We are starting with a number of institutions that have attracted a great deal of good will over generations, perform a vital public service and have a committed, dedicated and professional staff. As Dr. Coni from Addenbrookes has said:

"Now is not the time to pull down the edifice; it is time to build on what is there."

Dr. Coni is the clinician appointed by the health authority to give his clinical views after a lifetime in geriatrics.

That is also the view of the North Norfolk GPs and the department for medicine for the elderly at the Norfolk and Norwich hospital. There is no clinical case to support the closure of the community hospitals, quite the reverse. Now is absolutely the worst time to try to make any such decision. It would be a travesty if any such plans were approved.

Dr. Gibson: Did not Dr. Coni also say that the do-nothing option was not on?

Mr. Prior: I am not for one minute saying that we should do nothing—far from it. There is a strong case

for specialist rehabilitation centres. I am particularly in favour of the rehabilitation centre at Cromer, and all the traffic analysis by the university of East Anglia, to which the hon. Gentleman referred earlier, suggests that Cromer is the right location. We should not rule out options for the future and we should not decide now to close community hospitals when the facts do not support those decisions. If the health authority comes to any such decision, I would ask the Secretary of State to review the decision and take evidence from the clinical experts, including the GPs, the experts in geriatrics at the Norfolk and Norwich, and Dr. Coni, and to give weight to the common sense of all those who use, work for and support our community hospitals. The health authority's plans for intermediate care in North Norfolk are not acceptable.

12.39 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) on securing time for this important debate. The hon. Gentleman has, quite properly, expressed his concerns about the future of intermediate health services in Norfolk. I shall respond to the specific issues that he has raised, but first I shall set out the current position.

East Norfolk health authority, as the hon. Gentleman said, is in the process of preparing its intermediate care strategy. There has been extensive consultation, but no decision will be made until 25 November, when the health authority meets in public. The final strategy will then be decided.

The first stage of the consultation finished on 13 October, and the health authority is now considering its outcome. There will need to be a further period of full consultation if there is to be any significant variation in services which might be necessary to implement the agreed strategy. No decision can or will be taken behind closed doors. The health authority has been particularly open in its debate on the draft strategy "Facing the Future". Indeed, I am aware that the hon. Gentleman congratulated the health authority on its open approach.

Already the health authority has received more than 1,400 responses, and about 3,000 people have attended the 12 public meetings to discuss the strategy. I understand that three public meetings were held in the hon. Gentleman's constituency at Cromer, Fakenham and Holt. Although he was unable to attend any of them, I am well aware of his concerns and his desire to protect the community hospitals in his constituency.

Community hospitals are an established part of the local health service and rightly enjoy a great deal of local support. I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to all the staff in the community hospitals that he mentioned.

Intermediate care is a new way of organising those services that do not require the resources of a general hospital but are beyond the scope of the traditional primary care team. Intermediate care is a flexible concept, and the content of any intermediate care strategy will vary according to local need. It is about better ways of working and providing a seamless service for patients.

One of the factors that we need to consider is the role of intermediate care and other new models of care such as telemedicine in a modern NHS. There is a clear need to explore and evaluate those models of care and to share good practice right across the NHS. In recent years, we have made funds available through the continuing care challenge fund and winter pressures moneys to pilot this type of innovation within the service.

In the work that has been done in east Norfolk, intermediate care is defined as NHS community beds, rehabilitation and day treatment. The health authority's draft strategy for intermediate care identified an approach to determine the equitable provision of intermediate services in the future, and then it identified possible locations where services needed to be provided in order to respond to demand. It has also estimated the number of beds needed in each area.

The hon. Gentleman referred repeatedly to his concerns about those estimates. I know that others have expressed concern about the proposed number of beds. As he said, the health authority has commissioned independent research into that subject. The health authority strategy is now being reviewed in the light of the independent research, and a decision will be taken next week.

As has happened in other parts of the country, services have developed piecemeal over the years. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to acknowledge that. The health authority is of the view that the current service provided does not reflect population changes and the immense progress in medicine, which has resulted in shorter stays in hospital. In its view, the present provision does not give fair access to community beds across the county.

As the hon. Gentleman said, there are seven community hospitals in East Norfolk—Kelling, St. Michael's in Aylsham, Wells, North Walsham, Dereham, Wayland in Attleborough and Northgate in Great Yarmouth, which deliver a range of NHS services. Four of those are in north Norfolk—Kelling, North Walsham, Wells and St. Michael's. The health authority considers that that current layout of community hospitals is not equitable and that many people have to travel outside their area for in-patient NHS treatment. My understanding is that the health authority strategy aims to provide a much fairer pattern of NHS community beds across the whole of east Norfolk. Of the 458 beds covered by the review, 207 are in north Norfolk.

Mr. Prior: I am not an expert on hospitals or medicine. I can only repeat the views of the clinicians who have worked in north Norfolk, the general practitioners who will form the new primary care group, the experts in geriatrics at Norfolk and Norwich hospital, and now the independent firm of research consultants. They have come up with requirement levels for north Norfolk that are vastly different from those of the health authority.

Mr. Hutton: I shall come to that issue in a moment. My understanding is that the health authority, having

[Mr. Hutton]

commissioned that independent research, is now reviewing its strategy in the light of it. It would be premature to speculate and try to predict the results of that reconsideration ahead of the meeting on 25 November.

As I have said, I understand that 458 beds are covered by the review. Some 207 are in north Norfolk, 173 are in south Norfolk, 48 are in the Great Yarmouth area, but only 30 are in Norwich—the largest centre of population in the county. Only 27 out of 86 GP practices in east Norfolk have direct access to GP beds. I understand that no Norwich-based GP can refer direct to a community bed. That need to provide an equitable, quality service is the driving force behind the health authority's strategy.

The draft strategy will consider a number of new facilities, including an NHS centre with community beds in Norwich, new rehabilitation units for Norwich and Cromer—to which the hon. Gentleman referred—and day treatment and therapy centres for Norwich, Cromer, Great Yarmouth and Diss or Thetford. In considering the future of the community hospitals, occupancy levels were also considered as part of the strategy review. In north Norfolk, they have not been high. Until recently, figures showed that, of those 458 beds, an average of only about 340 were occupied at any one time.

As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Government are committed to providing the first-class national health service that the nation needs for the next millennium, which will provide the best possible balance and range of services for local people. We set out our plans for modernising the national health service in our White Paper last autumn. It is clear that hospitals will need to develop and evolve to meet the changing needs and expectations of the public and clinical advances. In some cases, that will mean building new hospitals; in others, it may mean closing old ones, changing their use, or using hospital facilities in new and different ways.

Hospitals and trusts will need to work more closely together and replace competition with co-operation and a renewed emphasis on improving quality, including national standards and clinical audit. As part of that modernisation programme, the Government have already approved 31 major hospital developments, worth almost £2.4 billion. That is the biggest renewal and modernisation programme in the history of the national health service. As the hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware, the largest private finance initiative health project yet agreed is the £214 million new hospital on the outskirts of Norwich that will serve much of north Norfolk and the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I am sure that he will want to welcome that major investment in the national health service in Norfolk.

The Government do not intend that hospital services will develop and evolve in a vacuum. New national service frameworks will provide a clear structure within which local hospital services should develop. In addition, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced recently, we have set up a national beds inquiry to review the needs and best usage of hospital facilities—particularly beds—to provide clear and strategic direction for the NHS locally in planning and developing services.

The Government are committed to the NHS, and have pledged large sums of money, which shows that commitment. Only this week, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health announced £180 million of capital investment for the new Eastern region next year. Last week, we announced a cash increase of £22.9 million for East Norfolk in its allocation for next year—a real-terms increase of nearly 4 per cent.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for North Norfolk failed to refer to that, but he did mention what he thought were pressures on social services budgets. It may be of interest to him that, under the terms of the comprehensive spending review, we were also able to announce significant increases for social services over the next three years, amounting to £3 billion. In addition to all that extra cash, for this year £3.2 million has been pledged to help East Norfolk to tackle waiting lists and winter pressures.

On the role of community hospitals, our White Paper recognised that community hospitals have been sidelined too often in the past. Our aim is to provide a service which offers swift advice and treatment, as close to where people live as possible. Community hospitals will be an important part of delivering such services and may, in many cases, provide an appropriate setting for intermediate care services. They will, however, have to fit into plans for the wider health and social care systems—and meet the same quality standards and fairness and efficiency tests—as other parts of the health care system.

There is no single national blueprint which will suit different localities. That is why it is the job of health authorities to ensure that local services are matched to local needs. There is no doubt that community hospitals, in some form, will have a key role to play—where they are appropriate and can provide a safe, clinically effective and efficient service for their locality. It is right that the future of community hospitals in Norfolk, as elsewhere, should be decided on that basis.

Under our White Paper proposals, primary care groups and trusts will be a focus for better integrating primary and community care services. Clearly, they will have a role in delivering intermediate care services, but the health authority has a strategic role in examining the overall pattern and range of services.

We must take into account whether any change in local health services will improve care for patients, and that applies to community hospitals just as much as to any other part of health service provision. No part of health care stands alone: it is an interconnected system—between primary, community and acute services. How that is delivered will differ from one area to another.

Ministers can become involved only if a local community health council objects to any of the proposals. Until such time, we must remain objective and impartial. In its draft strategy, the health authority states that the quality of patient care matters most. It is also a matter of equity. Those are both tenets to which the Government

clearly subscribe, and the Anglia and Oxford regional office—and, subsequently, the Eastern regional office—will be monitoring the situation to ensure that those considerations prevail.

If the matter is to come before Ministers—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eight minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 19 November 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Special Needs

1. **Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): If he will make a statement on the Government's plans for special needs education. [59102]

6. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What proposals he plans to bring forward following the consultation on the Green Paper on special educational needs, "Excellence for all Children". [59107]

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): Following consultation on our Green Paper, "Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs", and in the light of advice from the National Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs, we published earlier this month "Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme of Action", stating the practical steps that we shall take to support and promote developments in SEN. The action programme will be supported by funding of almost £60 million in 1999–2000.

Mr. McCabe: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. She will be familiar with the excellent work of the Dame Ellen Pinsent school in my constituency. At a recent meeting with parents at the school, I was struck by the number of them who feared that an inclusion policy might result in the school's closure. Will my hon. Friend assure those parents—all parents—of children with special needs that the Government will play no part in forcing the closure of good special schools, or in forcing children with special needs into mainstream schools? Will she assure those parents that any inclusion policy will ensure that they are totally involved in and fully consulted on that policy?

Ms Morris: I am delighted to give those assurances. Both my hon. Friend and I have children in our constituencies who attend the Dame Ellen Pinsent school, and I should like to add my warm words about its work. The thrust of the Green Paper on inclusion is to give parents a genuine choice. Many parents currently do not feel that they have the choice of educating their children in a mainstream school because that school is not able to cope with their children. However, not one word in reply to the Green Paper should cause any special school to feel under threat. Parents will retain their right to express a preference for a special school.

I should say also that there is at Dame Ellen Pinsent and other schools so much expertise in their teachers. We want to ensure that that expertise is used not only in special schools but in mainstream schools, to support a wider range of students. Special schools are safe if they are good schools and parents wish to send their children to them, but like all schools, special schools must accept the need to change and to offer high standards for our children.

Mr. Pike: I recognise what the Minister has just said, but will she make it absolutely clear that special schools that are meeting both parents' needs and the established criteria have a future in the all-inclusive education system, and that the two will work side by side when appropriate?

Ms Morris: Exactly. Our motivation is to give choice to parents and students and a good quality of education to every child with special educational needs. I am delighted to have this opportunity to say that not one word that I or other Ministers have said should lead any special school to fear that its future is in doubt. If parents wish to send their children to special schools, they will retain the right to do so. Any change to any school, regardless of whether it is a special school, is subject to local decisions, and it will be even more so in the new framework. I am happy to give those assurances, and am pleased that I have had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): I was interested to hear the Minister's reply. In Gloucestershire, there is pressure to close a very good school, Alderman Knight school, which provides an excellent service for children with special educational needs. As the Minister will be aware, many of those children also suffer physical disadvantages. Will she make it clear to all local education authorities that the policy she has just stated to the House is the Government's policy? There is much doubt in LEAs about what that policy is.

Ms Morris: There can be no doubt about it on the part of anyone who has read either the original document or the action plan that we have launched subsequently. I shall say again something that I have said many times before: no local authority, no school and no governing body should be quoting anything from either our documents or our words to imply that special schools should close on a point of principle. I do not know the circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I cannot be expected to know them. However, there are bound to be changes in the pattern of provision of education in local authority areas as times change and as parents express different preferences.

Of course, there may be occasions when the pattern of provision for children with special educational needs is such that a reorganisation of special needs provision is the best thing. Nothing that I have said suggests that special needs provision should be set in stone, but we are not sending a message that special schools do not have a future. They do have a future because they meet the needs

of some parents and pupils, and many of their staff have great expertise that we want to use across the school system.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): What assessment has the Minister made of the advocacy services, which are very often provided by the voluntary and charitable sector, to support parents through the statementing process when they are, for example, lodging an appeal? She will know that the service is patchy in parts of the country. Although the Department issues very good written advice about parents' rights, what plans does she have to make sure that there is uniform support and provision for parents going through what, for them, is often a very distressing process?

Ms Morris: My judgment is that the advocacy services often provided by voluntaries bodies are excellent and that they support parents at a very difficult time. I am delighted to be able to tell the hon. Lady that, as part of our action plan, we have made funds available for a parent partnership in every local authority area. We have restored a provision that was cut by the previous Government.

The financial resources that we have provided have ensured that that facility will be made available to parents. I have made it clear that I want and expect every local authority to develop parent partnerships to support parents in the way that the hon. Lady described. If, in due course, that has not happened, we shall look for legislative time to give the provision statutory force.

New Deal (Young People)

2. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): If he will make a statement on progress in securing employer involvement in the new deal for the young unemployed. [59103]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): The new deal is making good progress in securing employer involvement, with now nearly 33,000 employers signed up—254 of them in the Swindon district—and with firms of all sizes actively involved in the planning, promotion and delivery of the new deal.

Ms Drown: I thank my right hon. Friend for that helpful reply. My constituency has low unemployment, but some young people, and others eligible for the new deal, have real difficulties in returning to work, even with the support of the new deal. For example, they may have communication difficulties or lack some social skills. What advice does my right hon. Friend have for employers so that they might help into work some of the people who are not yet job-ready?

Mr. Smith: There are a number of ways in which employers can offer extra assistance—for example, through involvement in the design and delivery of the gateway, by encouraging employees to act as mentors, and by offering mock interviews—to help especially disadvantaged young people to get jobs. I am pleased to say that many employers are already doing just that, which is greatly to their credit. Indeed, I know of some in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the Minister confirm that nearly 80 per cent. of the companies that have signed up to the new deal have so far failed to recruit a single young new deal participant? In light of that, is it any surprise that employers are losing faith as the Government's elaborate flagship becomes just the latest in a long string of expensive failures?

Mr. Smith: No, I will confirm no such thing. The 33,000 employers who have signed up to the new deal are testimony to their confidence in it. As the hon. Gentleman is talking about the progress of the new deal, he might like to take account of the fact that, in 18 months, we have reduced youth unemployment to a level lower than it was at any time during the 18 years of the previous Government. What is more, in the six months the new deal has been up and running nationally, youth unemployment has fallen at nearly twice the rate it did in the six months before the general election.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Minister bear in mind that in some parts of Britain there are still pockets of very high unemployment, especially in coalfield areas where the Tories closed the pits? Will he pay special attention to that and ensure that special training centres are set up to mop up the unemployment? If he has time, will he also bear it in mind that towards the end of the year a new deal for jobs will be required for the unemployed hereditary peers? May I suggest that they be found tasks cleaning out the sewers?

Mr. Smith: I have taken serious note of what my hon. Friend said about hereditary peers and, more importantly, the needs of the coalfield communities. We are looking at the adequacy of the training provision and carefully monitoring the progress of young unemployed people into jobs or, through the other new-deal options, in gaining the skills that they need genuinely to enhance their employability. That is every bit as, if not more, important in coalfield areas, inner cities and estates that were blighted by high unemployment under the Conservatives but which this Government are taking action to help.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Does the Minister agree that one of the most difficult sectors of youth unemployment to place in work is that from the ethnic minorities? Is he aware that 20 per cent. fewer people from ethnic minorities find subsidised employment through the new deal? For example, in Lambeth where half the people on options are from ethnic minorities, only one in four finds subsidised employment. Is it not time the Department started keeping records so that the anomalies can be understood and rectified?

Mr. Smith: It is because we started keeping records that the hon. Gentleman can ask the question. Under the new deal, we have introduced ethnic monitoring for the first time. In the spirit of co-operation on the part of the hon. Gentleman's party, he might like to refer to the glass as half full rather than half empty. The good news from the early figures is that, so far, ethnic minorities have been moving into unsubsidised jobs at the same rate as the rest of the population.

As for the options, a higher proportion of ethnic minorities are involved in the full-time education and training option and the voluntary sector option and a lower proportion in the employment option and the environmental task force. Of course we are closely

monitoring that and looking into the reasons for it; and we shall make any necessary adjustments to the programme to provide full and fair opportunities for ethnic minorities.

College for Educational Leadership

3. **Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): If he will make a statement on the College for Educational Leadership. [59104]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced our plans to establish a new national college for school leadership at a conference for new head teachers on 20 October. The proposals for the college will form part of the major programme for modernisation of the teaching profession to be set out in a Green Paper to be published before the end of the year. The college is intended to provide heads with the cutting-edge leadership skills they need to drive up standards in schools. We intend to publish a prospectus for the college early next year and the college will be established in 2000.

Charlotte Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. In the light of the Select Committee's report on the role of head teachers, does he recognise that if we are to overcome the recruitment difficulties, we must make the profession more attractive and respected? Obviously, higher training and a better system of training are one solution, but another would be to provide more systematic mentoring and support from local education authorities and outside bodies.

Mr. Clarke: I pay tribute to the Select Committee report, a task in which my hon. Friend played a major part. It is a very valuable report. As she well knows, it recommends that the Government consider how the college might focus on raising the profile of school leadership, bring cohesion to the training and development of heads and build on existing best practice. One very important element of existing best practice is mentoring, which exists in some schools and is very effective. I very much agree with my hon. Friend that one of the college's objectives will be to find ways of developing the relationship between schools and the wider community, through mentoring and other means.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The college may want to focus on schools that are coasting, particularly in educating 14 to 16-year-olds, so will the Minister repeat the Government's commitment to introducing a progress index that shows the performance of all schools in educating 14 to 16-year-olds—or will there be a climb down? Will the Government publish information only on schools in grades A and B? Would not such a U-turn be evidence of how far the Government are out of touch with the views of secondary teachers around the country?

Mr. Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is making a statement on that later this afternoon. We have been clear throughout—in the face of Conservative opposition—about the need to develop effective value-added data on the basis of which parents can make accurate judgments about the schools that they are considering. We have a pilot project going through that in great detail, and it is our strong intention to develop the value-added data in a way that will assist parents to make the informed judgments that they wish to make.

Mr. Willetts: During oral questions on education and employment, Madam Speaker, it is unacceptable for the Minister to tell the House that there will be a statement on the matter later today. If the Government are going to abandon their previous stated policy of publishing an index of the performance of all secondary schools, the House should be told so now.

Mr. Clarke: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the main question is about a college for educational leadership and headship training, which is not what he has asked about. My right hon. Friend is making a statement on the matter later. It will speak for itself.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Willetts: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot take points of order in the middle of questions.

University Tuition Fees

4. **Mr. Robert N. Wareing** (Liverpool, West Derby): How many representations he has received in respect of the introduction of tuition fees for students attending university; and how many have been *(a)* favourable and *(b)* unfavourable to the policy. [59105]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. George Mudie): Since the announcement of our initial response to the Dearing report in July 1997, we have received nearly 10,000 letters on the new funding arrangements, in largely three tranches. The correspondence has covered many aspects of the issue, and because of its range has not been classified in the way requested.

Mr. Wareing: Does my hon. Friend understand that, in future years, when there may be an increase in the number of higher education places available, the sons and daughters of the working class or of middle-class people of moderate means will not be able to avail themselves of them because of tuition fees and the abolition of maintenance grants? Will he carry out an urgent consultation with the university authorities and the National Union of Students with a view to reviewing the entire situation, in the light of Labour's traditional policy of free education for all?

Mr. Mudie: We introduced fees to increase and widen participation, which my hon. Friend should agree with. We have also spent considerable additional sums. I am sure that my hon. Friend shares our objectives, particularly as we have built in safeguards to ensure that individuals from lower-income families do not have to pay fees. I am sure that when my hon. Friend goes back

to his constituency, he will be at pains to get across to working class families the fact that they will not be paying fees, so that should not be a consideration. We want them to encourage their children to go where they should be—to our universities.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Minister share with the House the reason why the Prime Minister cancelled the meeting that was arranged with students at the university of Strathclyde to discuss tuition fees? And why did the BBC fail, for the first time ever, to carry the story of a demonstration against the Prime Minister on tuition fees?

Mr. Mudie: If the hon. Lady wants to ask the Prime Minister, Wednesday is the right day, not Thursday. The House will be aware that the Prime Minister has many calls on his time, being the particularly accessible Prime Minister that he is. I am sure that the hon. Lady understands.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): How many representations have been submitted by or on behalf of adult students? Many adult students do not enter higher education in order to be able to earn more. They may earn the same amount following such education as they did beforehand, but will have sacrificed three years' earnings. Will not they face particular difficulties due to the fee arrangements?

Mr. Mudie: As my hon. Friend is aware, repayments relate to income—unlike under the previous scheme. Any loans to be repaid depend on the individual being in work, and start only when the individual begins earning more than £10,000 a year.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): May I express my regret that the Minister could not find time to join me and many others on the platform at the National Union of Students rally last week, where students of all political persuasions condemned the Government for their multiple attacks on student finances? Will he confirm that, significantly, applications from mature students—who know something about debt—were 10 per cent. down this year? Will he explain, not just to me but to many of his hon. Friends, why he did not follow Lord Dearing's advice to keep the maintenance grant in order to increase access to higher education, rather than damage it, as the Government have done?

Mr. Mudie: I find it humorous, to say the least, to be invited to share with the hon. Gentleman the platform of an organisation which the Conservative party at one stage wanted to abolish. We have taken steps this year on the issue of mature students; additional steps will be taken next year. We are alive to difficulties and opportunities.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Was not the introduction of tuition fees a necessary step to restore university funding? Does my hon. Friend agree that the supposed decrease in applications, which many who opposed tuition fees predicted did not materialise? Will he reassure the House that he will not be following the advice of the recent Fabian Society pamphlet, which was to introduce differential top-up fees so that some institutions can charge higher fees? Is not that the fundamental difference between those of us on the Government Benches and the Conservative party?

Mr. Mudie: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. It is worth recalling that, when the Conservative party left government, university numbers had risen by 40 per cent., but income per unit had fallen by 25 per cent., leaving the universities in a desperate financial situation.

National Literacy Hour

5. **Jackie Ballard** (Taunton): If he will make a statement on implementation of the national literacy hour. [59106]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): The literacy hour came into being in September. Three hundred thousand framework documents have been issued, and training for co-ordinators in every school and training materials for every teacher have been provided. We are delighted that the response in schools up and down the country has been tremendous. As with the literacy pilot schemes, there have been great improvements in literacy, phonics and the grammar of children who have been undertaking the literacy hour.

Jackie Ballard: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. Recently, the chief inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, offered to intervene on behalf of schools that do not want to implement aspects of the national literacy strategy, including the literacy hour, providing that they can prove to him that their results are good enough. Will the Secretary of State clarify who is in charge of implementation of the literacy hour—the national literacy centre or the chief inspector of schools?

Mr. Blunkett: The chief inspector has a very clear role in assessing, through inspection, whether schools are providing the quality and meeting the standards that we have stipulated. His job, therefore, is to assess whether teaching methods are appropriate. If the literacy hour is adapted, so that it allows a school to meet a pupil's particular needs and reach the targets that it, the education authority and the Government are establishing, there is no problem whatever.

The approach is not prescriptive but proactive, ensuring that schools meet the best and that all children, whichever school they attend, will be able to read and write by the time they reach secondary level.

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Halesowen and Rowley Regis): Does my right hon. Friend share my view that it is extraordinary that Conservative Members oppose the literacy hour? Does that not reveal their wish to avoid teaching most children in primary schools the basics of phonics, grammar and spelling?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend raises an important point, because the shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment—for want of a better term—has written about his disagreement with the literacy hour in *The Times Educational Supplement*.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): It is too rigid.

Mr. Blunkett: What is rigid about it is that people are being asked to teach phonics, grammar and spelling.

We need the Conservatives to tell us now, in public, whether they have abandoned any wish for children in our state schools to have the same opportunities as they buy for their own children in private education.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I assure the Secretary of State that the Conservatives are, of course, committed to improving literacy standards. The issue is whether the Government's literacy hour will achieve that. In Birmingham last month, members of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers told Professor Barber, the head of the Government's standards and effectiveness unit, that the literacy strategy is pushing teachers to breaking point.

Recent research by Warwick university has suggested that the literacy hour is too long—*[Laughter.]* Yes it is. Last month the Secretary of State for Scotland supported the launch of an alternative literacy strategy based on research that showed that of a number of literacy programmes, those advocated for the literacy hour gave the worst results. Will the Secretary of State now listen to the voices of academics and teachers, and to his right hon. Friend, and think again?

Mr. Blunkett: When is an hour not an hour? When it is only 59 minutes? What a silly comment. We are building the literacy strategy entirely on the experience of the national literacy centres. In a spirit of co-operation, just in case the hon. Lady has forgotten, I remind her that it was her own damn Government that set up the national literacy centres in the first place. We have drawn on the evidence of the centres that her party set up, we have established programmes across the country, and we have learnt that in two years the national literacy framework improved the reading age of children by eight to 12 months.

The programme is working, as is demonstrated by a 10-point increase in the English and literacy standards of those 11-year-olds over the past two years, and it will work in every town and city in the country. As one teacher in Birmingham put it:

"I was determined to be critical of it, but I find I can't be".

Such reservations, of course, have never stopped Conservative Members.

Parental Support

7. **Mr. Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What measures his Department is taking to support parents of young children in disadvantaged areas. [59108]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): The Government's early education and child care policies are intended for all families with young children. However, support for family literacy and learning, homestart, and much of the funding for the national child care strategy, recognise social need. That, coupled with the sure start programme, provides a strategy for tackling the legacy of multiple deprivation.

Mr. Coaker: Does the Minister agree that we need to ensure that our anti-poverty strategies stretch across all our cities and communities, so that areas sometimes missed out of anti-poverty work benefit as well?

Will she join me in paying tribute to the work of the Greater Nottingham partnership and Gedling borough council on their parenting initiative in one of the poorest areas of my borough—namely, Netherfield?

Ms Hodge: I agree with my hon. Friend that we must address deprivation and poverty wherever they exist, and particularly pockets of deprivation in otherwise relatively affluent areas. Therefore, I am particularly pleased that we have embarked on the sure start programme. It will be an area-focused programme, but within pram-pushing distance of families, and therefore closer to the pockets of deprivation. Initiatives such as the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit will ensure an individual approach. I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Greater Nottingham partnership and Gedling borough council on their anti-poverty strategy and parenting initiative.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I understand that one way in which the Government seek to support children in disadvantaged areas is through their education action zones. Is every private sector company involved in education action zones going ahead with the bids which have been accepted, or are some of those who indicated their support at the outset now saying that, because of the Government's ambivalence over the involvement of private sector and profit-making organisations in our education system, they may not go ahead with their support?

Ms Hodge: That is simply not true. Every education action zone has private sector involvement, and that is going from strength to strength in each education action zone. I was at lunch with the leader of one of those education action zones, who was applauding the involvement of the private sector. The Government are also grateful for that growing involvement.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): The consultation paper on family policy talked about the important role that health visitors play, and could play in the future, in supporting all parents with very young children. Given that many parents need advice between the birth of a child, when the health service is involved, and the time when a child starts school, when the education system takes over, will my hon. Friend have talks with her colleagues in the Department of Health with a view to enabling health visitors to play that vital role in future?

Ms Hodge: I congratulate my hon. Friend on becoming the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Employment. I share his view that it is important that we have a co-ordinated approach, across all the professions, to children in their early years. Health visitors have a critical role to play in that regard. That is why we see them playing a crucial role in the sure start project which we will establish in 250 areas across the country. I am involved in discussions with colleagues, such as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health, to ensure that health visitors are incorporated—as are other professionals—in the work that we are doing with young children.

Local Education Authority Expenditure

8. **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): If he will make a statement on *(a)* the administrative expenditure of and *(b)* peripatetic support provided by, local education authorities. [59109]

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): The Government's plans for the further development of financial delegation to schools will require local education authorities to keep their administrative expenditure under strict control while at the same time enabling them to maintain essential support services for their schools. A draft of the regulations giving effect to our proposals will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Mr. George: I am grateful to the Minister for that helpful reply. Bearing in mind the fact that in dispersed and rural areas, such as Cornwall, the cost can be great, will the Minister assure the House that the cost of providing education services peripatetically—such as services for visually impaired or hearing-impaired pupils—are fully reflected in the allocation formula for local education authorities across the country?

Ms Morris: I am aware of the position in the hon. Gentleman's county, where a large number of children have special educational needs statements and there is a strong peripatetic service. I can assure him that local authorities will be able to retain funding for low-incidence SEN disabilities, and that nothing we have decided on so far should disturb the arrangements to which he referred.

Mr. [illegible] Gardiner (Brent, North): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be delighted to know that in my constituency, the central retention budget, at about £139 per head, is one of the lowest in the country. However, having such a low centrally retained budget creates certain problems for a local authority—for instance, when bidding for the private finance initiative for schools. Will my hon. Friend look into the problems that local authorities may experience when the centrally retained budget does not allow for enough in-house legal and design service expertise to produce a bid, which may disadvantage them? Will she study ways in which other money might be made available to such authorities?

Ms Morris: It is for Brent to decide how it conducts its business, but I have not noticed a lack of interest, enthusiasm or activity on the part of local education authorities in proposing PFIs to the Department. Those are coming in in great numbers and we welcome that. Of course, Brent can buy expertise from elsewhere to prepare its PFI bid if it has not retained sufficient staff to do so itself. I will be happy to discuss that matter further with my hon. Friend outside the Chamber, if that would be helpful.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): When the Minister studies local authority expenditure on education, will she take careful account of the answer given by the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) to the previous question, in which she recognised that otherwise affluent areas contain pockets of deprivation. At a school such as Watchetts county primary in my constituency, which is a pioneer in, for example, after-school clubs, 60 per cent. of pupils are statemented or have special educational needs. Will she take account of that and lobby her ministerial colleagues in the Treasury and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that no further cuts are made in provision for shire counties? The only effect of such cuts would be further damage to schools. While the Minister is on her feet, will she say how she can possibly justify the discourtesy that we were shown in an earlier answer, when it was announced that the Secretary of State would not make a statement to the House but would once again bypass it and make one elsewhere?

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman has a cheek, as a Conservative Member, talking about reductions in education funding. Having said that, I entirely accept that there are constituencies in shire and city areas which contain pockets of deprivation, but they are small pockets compared with some other local authorities, or indeed, constituencies within them. Of course, when we allocate money to local authorities we take into account the needs of all children in all constituencies and local authorities. The way in which local authorities allocate that money to schools is their decision. From my experience I know that the right thing for local Members of Parliament to do is to campaign and lobby at local authority level to ensure that the needs of their constituency are met. The greatest advantage under this Government is that there is a larger pot of money to go at.

Surplus Places

9. **Jacqui Smith** (Redditch): What support he provides for areas undertaking school reorganisation to remove surplus places. [59110]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): We make capital allocations to support cost-effective projects to remove surplus places. We have allocated £40 million for surplus place removal projects due to begin in the current financial year.

Jacqui Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware that Redditch schools are being reviewed with the aim of removing 2,000 surplus places. While I support that aim, it is causing considerable local concern as at least 20 schools will be directly affected and the knock-on effects will cover the whole town. Will he assure me that if the reorganisation plans end up on his desk, he will undertake to get the views of parents, schools and governors throughout the town? Furthermore, as he has recognised the capital implications of such reorganisations, will he assure me that areas such as Redditch will get priority for capital allocation?

Mr. Clarke: I am aware that my hon. Friend's local education authority is still consulting on options for Redditch. That is properly a matter for the authority. If it decides to publish proposals, local people will have an opportunity to object and make their points clear in whatever way they think fit. A decision on any such proposals must be made on the merits of the case, taking account of education, economic factors and the views of

local people. I will be happy to listen to and consider carefully all representations that my hon. Friend and her constituents make.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Will the Minister give a simple pledge that no school will close as a result of any reorganisation that may follow a ballot leading to the abolition of grammar schools?

Mr. Clarke: First, as the hon. Gentleman knows, grammar schools are not being abolished. Secondly, grammar schools have nothing to do with school reorganisation to remove surplus places. Thirdly, I will not give a pledge that no school will close as a result of reorganisation to remove surplus places. As he well knows, that is a matter for local education authorities, which will decide how properly to deal with it. I am confident and pleased that LEAs are dealing with the issue in a responsible and forward-looking way, without making party political points as he takes great pleasure in doing.

New Deal

10. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will report progress on the new deal initiative. [59111]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): The new deal has taken on board 160,000 young people across the country—50,000 have entered options, 30,000 of whom have entered jobs. In Chipping Barnet, I am glad to say, there have been nearly 2,000 gateway interviews, giving young people hope for the future.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Obviously, I welcome any progress in the reduction of youth unemployment, but is the right hon. Gentleman concerned that the drop-out rate seems to be about 40 to 45 per cent.? Is he inquiring why young people are dropping out and where they are going? Is he in his heart satisfied that this very expensive initiative is the most cost-effective way in which to move people from the dole into gainful employment?

Mr. Blunkett: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes anything that gets young people off the dole, as the shadow Secretary of State is on record saying that the scheme is a monumental irrelevance. It is certainly not an irrelevance to those 50,000 young people who have found an option. The drop-out rate is not 45 per cent.; cumulatively, it is 19 per cent, which is 6 per cent. lower than for any equivalent programme that was run by the previous Government. If he had been courteous and committed enough to turn up to the meetings in his area to which he was invited, to discuss the new deal and help us to implement it, he might have been a little better informed.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Having examined evidence from the new deal pathfinder areas and from the new deal for lone parents, the Education and Employment Committee, of which I am a member, has highlighted the importance of personal advisers in targeting advice and assistance that is tailored to the individual's needs. We have been heartened by that, particularly in the light of the earlier scepticism about the ability of the Employment Service to undertake that job. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that continuing attention will be given both to the training needs of people in the Employment Service, so that they can undertake that important job, and to the case load, so that the role of personal advisers will continue to be a critical feature of the programme?

Mr. Blunkett: I can give that assurance. Indeed, next year, we will be allocating more money to the Employment Service for training to conduct similar gateway interviews for adult unemployed men and women, so that we can extend the advisory service, which has been so successful. The advisory service provides the gateway and ensures that young people are prepared educationally and socially to take jobs—that is why it sometimes takes longer to place the young person in a vacancy. In Australia, a similar system failed precisely because it was used to reduce the dole queue and not to prepare young people for the world of work of tomorrow and to ensure that they had the training and qualifications to do the job.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Does the Secretary of State accept that he will need accurate data if he is to give a progress report on the new deal? Will he confirm that his Department does not monitor even the number of starts on the employment option by employer? When I asked the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities for data on the new deal, I was supplied with information from an incorrect source and an incorrect date—the figures were inaccurate by nearly 350 per cent. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, when I requested information on what people in the full-time education and training option were doing, the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities asked his officials to collect those data only the day before he replied to me?

Mr. Blunkett: I am completely convinced that that last point is simply not true. With further education colleges taking on full-time trainees across the board on a rolling programme—not at the beginning of each term—it is not surprising that data are difficult to come by, but I take on board entirely what the hon. Gentleman says about statistical data and monitoring. We inherited a completely hopeless system of monitoring and evaluation of what was taking place in the service. We are updating it, and EDS has taken on a new contract and is making capital investment. I am determined that we will get the monitoring and statistics right. If any inaccuracies are drawn to our attention, we will deal with them immediately.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The new deal is making progress, and I can see that in my constituency, but does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we are to continue that process, we need to ensure that the employers who have become involved are kept involved? There have been some problems with delays in paying money due to employers from the Employment Service. Will he ensure that money is paid when it is due, because otherwise we are likely to lose some employers from the scheme?

Mr. Blunkett: I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance. There is no excuse for non-payment and we want to give a lead by preventing the liquidity of small

companies from being undermined, as it has so often been, by the failure of larger companies to pay on time. I seem to remember that the previous Deputy Prime Minister was going to do something about that, but never did. We will do something about it, and if my hon. Friend draws it to my personal attention and to that of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities, we will act immediately.

Temporary Classrooms (Colchester)

11. **Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): How many of the temporary classrooms in the Colchester constituency he expects will be replaced with permanent accommodation by 2002. [59112]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): I understand that there are 112 temporary classrooms in 47 maintained schools in Colchester. It is for the local education authority and, until April 1999, the Funding Agency for Schools, to decide in consultation with schools what priority to give to replacing temporary classrooms.

Mr. Russell: I accept that the previous Government left the legacy of all those temporary classrooms, but if the Government want to reduce class sizes, how will the youngsters be accommodated? What priority do the Government give to replacing temporary classrooms? Does the Minister agree that such classrooms are a substandard way of providing accommodation and that the Government are failing a whole generation?

Mr. Clarke: Obviously, I cannot and do not accept that for a moment. I agree that there is a legacy of capital underspending over the past 18 years, which we are setting about repairing. It is for the local education authority to decide how to address the problem and we are encouraging authorities to produce asset management plans to enable them to focus on the best way of lifting the quality of provision in their area. That is the job of Essex LEA, as it is of all other LEAs, and the position on temporary classrooms takes its place within that overall capital strategy that we want to encourage.

State and Private Schools

12. **Dr. Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): If he will make a statement on relations between the state and private school sectors. [59114]

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): We welcome closer collaboration between independent and maintained schools in raising standards. To promote partnership, we are supporting 47 projects with £600,000 this year, and a further £1 million from April 1999. We established an advisory group to monitor partnerships and build bridges and we accepted all the recommendations in its recent report.

Dr. Wright: Does my hon. Friend remember the historic occasion last month when she addressed the headmasters and headmistresses conference jamboree and received a standing ovation? Does she think that she received that ovation because the teachers think that we have invented a system of noblesse oblige, subsidised by the state and sanctified with the language of partnership? When more than 50 per cent. of the applicants accepted at Oxford and Cambridge still come from the 7 per cent. of private schools, might it be that an attack on educational inequality needs another dimension, even if ovations become somewhat more muted?

Ms Morris: I remember well my visits to independent sector conferences for different reasons, and I was heartened by the response I received from the Headmasters Conference in Jersey. My hon. Friend gave his explanation for that good reception, but I am clear that the conference was pleased to have a Government who wanted to work with it in partnership on a common agenda to raise standards. The conference was heartened by the initiatives that we have set in train for the two sectors to work together and it was pleased that we have committed ourselves to a further £1 million over two years to enhance that work.

The best way to end the disadvantage that some children face in our school system is not to attack others but to ensure that we raise standards in all schools. We are doing that through our literacy and numeracy strategies and through continued investment in the maintained sector. I look forward to continuing the good start we have made in maintaining relationships with the independent sector.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): The bottom line of the Government's approach to the private sector in schools is that they have closed the doors of many ancient institutions of learning to the children of those parents who cannot afford to pay the fees. Is not the difference between the two parties that we gave those children a seat at the table, whereas the Minister thinks that they should be content with the crumbs that fall from the table?

Ms Morris: If that had been the case, I would not have received a good reception from the HMC when I visited it in Jersey. Under this Government, no school will get the crumbs from somebody else's table. We care about giving every child a chance and the solution is not to give some a ladder into the independent sector, but to be deadly serious about making every school a good one. It is inexcusable that under the right hon. Gentleman's Government, the message given to children from disadvantaged areas was that they should escape from the maintained sector because the Government did not exercise their responsibility for it properly. That will not happen under this Government. Parents can be assured that their children will receive a good quality education without having to leave the maintained sector.

University Places (Take-Up)

13. **Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If he will make a statement on the take-up of university places in the current academic year. [59115]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. George Mudie): Overall the total number of accepted home applicants has already exceeded the final 1996 figure and is running at just 4,000 below the comparable 1997 figure of nearly 300,000.

Dr. Jones: What does my hon. Friend's analysis of the take-up of university places this year tell him of the

prospects for the Government achieving their aim of increasing the proportion of people from lower-income backgrounds obtaining higher educational qualifications?

Mr. Mudie: Without being complacent, we are clear that the increase we projected of 500,000 additional students in further and higher education by 2002 will be achieved. My hon. Friend knows how keen my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is to widen participation and it is clear from an analysis of this year's figures that fears that working-class youngsters would be put off applying to university by the fees have not been realised. The figures have stayed at the same level and we are confident that we will achieve a wider participation.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does the Minister agree that it is alarming that the number of applications from mature students has slumped for next year? Many such students want the second chance offered by a return to learning, and many have family responsibilities. Will he commit the Government to monitoring the impact of charges imposed to see whether they are having a particular effect either by sector or by type of student? That would allow us to see whether Dearing was right and the Government wrong, as I strongly suspect is the case.

Mr. Mudie: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has ended on such a sour note. We agree that the figures should be carefully analysed. The number of youngsters applying for next year has gone up, and there are several reasons for the drop in the number of mature students. Mature students had the flexibility to move their applications forward to 1997, which was not available to younger students. Other factors are demography—that cohort was 3 per cent. down—greater participation in higher education by some groups, and a stronger labour market. Those factors may explain the numbers, but I agree that analysis is necessary, and I share the hon. Gentleman's ambition to increase the number of mature students.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I have your guidance on the extraordinary answer that I received earlier from the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke)? I asked about the Government's U-turn in abandoning plans to publish a merit table for all schools covering 14 to 16-year-olds, and the Minister said that there would be a statement on the matter later today. Will you remind Ministers, Madam Speaker, of the importance of ensuring that statements of such consequence are made first to the House?

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. We will publish full performance tables in a day or two. There will be no statement to the House today, but I shall issue a press release about a minor change to performance tables. That does not affect our commitment to value-added tables, or to ensuring that information is available on GCSEs and the points system.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I hope that you may clear up some confusion that has arisen. I refer to the House of Lords of yesterday, when a Minister, Lord Williams of Mostyn, said:

"This is the end of our road. Prorogation is upon us. If the Government are again defeated tonight, the Bill will fall. The Government will therefore have failed to secure safe passage for a manifesto commitment."

Just a few minutes later, another Minister, Baroness Jay, said:

"My Lords, this Bill has now been lost for the Session. However, it will be introduced in the next Session under the procedures of the Parliament Acts."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 November 1998; Vol. 594, c. 1354-60.]

I ask, therefore, whether you, Madam Speaker, will delay Prorogation in order to allow a Minister to come to the House—helpfully, the Leader of the House is already here—to explain what is going on. Contradictory statements have been made by Ministers in the other place.

Madam Speaker: As the right hon. Gentleman and the whole House know, I am not responsible for Government statements. Nor am I prepared to suspend Prorogation. I shall, however, suspend the House until 3.50 pm.

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners:

The House went;—and, having returned:

Royal Assent

4.19 pm

Madam Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers, where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Statute Law Repeals Act 1998

Waste Minimisation Act 1998

Regional Development Agencies Act 1998

Scotland Act 1998

Northern Ireland Act 1998

Registration of Political Parties Act 1998

Prorogation

Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Madam Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Lord High Chancellor, one of the Lord Commissioners, delivered Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy and also directed that the terms of the speech be printed in the Journal of the House. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I were pleased to receive the State Visits of his Excellency the President of Brazil in December 1997 and of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan in May this year. We remember with great pleasure our visit to Canada in June and our State Visits to Pakistan and India in October 1997 and to Brunei and Malaysia in September of this year. Likewise I remember my visit to France and Belgium on 11 November.

My Government promised to govern for the benefit of the whole nation.

In Northern Ireland, my Government have continued to work towards peace, stability and reconciliation. Their efforts to promote a comprehensive political settlement contributed to the Agreement reached in the multi-party talks. They have moved speedily to implement that Agreement, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum. They have continued to foster the improvement of economic and social conditions through inward investment and other means. New measures for tackling terrorism have been introduced following the Omagh bombing.

The education of young people has been my Government's top priority. Legislation has been enacted to help raise standards in schools and phase out the assisted places scheme. The money saved has been used to cut class sizes. An Act has also been passed to reform teacher training, create a General Teaching Council and introduce new student support arrangements. Green Papers have been published setting out plans to help those with special educational needs and promote lifelong learning.

The process of modernising the National Health Service has begun. The largest ever capital programme is under way following the passage of the NHS (Private Finance) Act. My Government have appointed the first ever Minister for Public Health and outlined their strategy for reducing inequalities in health. Steps have also been taken to ensure that Health and Local Authorities work together effectively, particularly to improve the services for children in care.

My Government have pursued economic policies aimed at delivering stable levels of economic growth, employment and opportunities for all.

To that end, measures have been taken to put the economy firmly on course for steady growth with low inflation. Legislation has been enacted to give the Bank of England operational responsibility for setting interest rates, in order to deliver price stability and support the Government's overall economic policy within a framework of enhanced accountability.

Tough fiscal rules have been introduced and firm action taken to meet them, by reducing public borrowing. The new fiscal policy framework including a Code for Fiscal Stability, underpinned by legislation, will ensure that decisions on the public finances promote Britain's long-term economic goals.

My Government promised to attack youth and long term unemployment. They have already begun to expand employment opportunities and to make work pay. Reform of the tax and benefit systems to ensure that people are better off in work has begun, and the New Deal programmes are already extending new work opportunities to people who had been excluded from the labour market.

An Act has been passed which begins the process of modernising the Social Security system, particularly in the areas of decision making appeals and National Insurance contributions. And proposals for further welfare reform have been presented to Parliament to promote work for those who are able to work and security for those who cannot.

My Government have worked with business to promote sustainable growth. A wide range of measures have been introduced to encourage investment in industry, skills and new technologies and to increase productivity. To encourage entrepreneurship and to help create successful and profitable businesses, an Act to reform the framework for competition for business and industry has been enacted, and the structure of corporation taxes has been reformed.

My Government are committed to fairness at work. Legislation has been passed which will lead to the introduction of a National Minimum Wage.

My Government have completed a comprehensive review of public expenditure, reallocating spending to match priorities and eliminate waste and inefficiency. Within firm three year limits, additional resources have been provided for education, health and transport; and the new Investing in Britain Fund will double net public investment over the Parliament, providing for the renewal, reform and modernisation of Britain's infrastructure.

A White Paper has been published setting out plans for an integrated transport policy in England and Wales, aimed at providing better transport services, and reducing congestion and pollution from transport.

Legislation was enacted to strengthen the local authority capital finance system.

Measures have been put forward to combat crime. Legislation has been passed to provide for radical reform of the youth justice system, local partnerships to cut crime and disorder and measures to reduce offending. Legislation had also been enacted to prohibit the private possession of all handguns.

To ensure that as many people as possible have access to the benefits of the National Lottery, an Act has been passed to extend the scope of Lottery distribution to encompass health, education and the environment. It also included measures to improve regulation.

Decentralisation is essential to my Government's vision of a modern nation. An Act has been passed to enable people in Scotland and Wales to vote on proposals for a devolved Scottish Parliament and the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales. These have been approved

[Madam Speaker]

in Referendums in Scotland and Wales and Acts have been passed to implement them. My Government have also taken a first step towards decentralising decision-taking to the English regions.

A White Paper has been published setting out a 10 year programme for the reform and renewal of local governance in England and an Act has been passed which enabled the people of London to vote in a referendum on my Government's proposals for an elected Mayor and Assembly for London. These proposals were approved in a referendum on 7 May, and a Bill is to be introduced to implement them.

An Act has been passed to establish Regional Development Agencies in England to bring a regional focus to the economic development and regeneration of the English Regions.

My Government are committed to open and transparent Government. Legislation has been passed to strengthen the data protection controls over the use of personal information about individuals and an Act has been passed to give full effect in the United Kingdom law to the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Members of the House of Commons

I thank you for the provision you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public service.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government have taken a leading role in the European Union. They negotiated and signed the Treaty of Amsterdam which included provisions enabling the UK to opt into the social chapter. The United Kingdom has now ratified the Treaty. They took part in initial negotiations on the European Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals which included reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

During the United Kingdom's Presidency of the European Union, efforts were made to promote employment and to improve competitiveness. Negotiations on enlargement were opened and good progress was made on key Presidency priorities for co-operation in the European Union, including the fight against drugs and crime, an effective external policy, economic reform and an agreement to a code of conduct on arms export. My Government oversaw the historic decision confirming that eleven Member States met the conditions for joining the single currency, as well as the establishment of the European Central Bank.

My Government have allocated additional resources to tackle global poverty and to promote sustainable development They are implementing the policies set out in the White Paper on International Development.

In May this year, the G8 Summit in Birmingham agreed measures to promote employability at home and the development of poorer countries abroad, help the environment and tackle international crime. They also successfully hosted an Asia-Europe meeting in April 1998 and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh in October 1997.

Vigorous action has been taken to protect the environment, and against terrorism, drugs, money laundering and organised crime. My Government played a leading part in securing agreement at the Kyoto Conference on Climate Change to commitments to binding reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions.

The United Kingdom played a full part in the negotiations which led to the agreement in July to establish the International Criminal Court.

My Government put human rights at the centre of foreign policy and published the first Annual Report on Human Rights. They ratified the two Additional Protocols to the Geneva convention on the Protections of Victims of War, adopted an abolitionist stance on the death penalty, and took steps to prevent the export of torture equipment. They hosted a conference on Nazi Gold, and helped set up a relief fund for victims of Nazi persecution.

As evidence of their commitment to international peace and security, my Government passed legislation enabling the United Kingdom to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines. They will continue to urge all those who have not done so to adhere to these treaties.

Progress has also been made to reform and strengthen the United Nations.

My Government have worked to modernise our defence capability so that it matches the changing strategic setting. The Strategic Defence Review—the most far reaching reform of our armed forces since the war—reassessed our security interests and defence needs and provided the Armed Forces and all those who work in defence with a clear long-term vision. Arrangements for strong and modern defence based on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation have been maintained and my Government played a major role in the decisions taken at NATO's Madrid Summit and in the steps taken to strengthen NATO's relationship with Russia, and they have notified the UK acceptance of the accession to the Alliance of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may attend you.

A Commission was also read for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Lord Chancellor said:

"My Lords and Members of the House of Commons: by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to Tuesday the twenty-fourth day of this instant November, to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Tuesday the twenty-fourth day of this instant November."

End of the First Session (opened on 7 May 1997) of the Fifty-Second Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the Forty-Seventh Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 9 November 1998

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Service Provision

Mr. Dennis Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps the Commission is taking to improve the machinery for the provision of services to hon. Members and the House. [58776]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission has decided to set up a review of the present system of management of the House and its facilities.

It has appointed Mr. Michael Braithwaite, a management consultant, who will be supported by a team of officials to review

"the system of management and decision-making responsibilities for services to the House which was set up following the inquiry in 1990 by Sir Robin Ibbs".

Members and staff will be consulted in the course of the review.

The Commission will, in due course, put the findings of the review before the House.

House Stationery

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if she will make a statement on the decision not to offer hon. Members the option of using bespoke House stationery printed on recycled paper. [58849]

Mrs. Roe: The Committee's decision to introduce a standard House of Commons paper was made against the following background; *(a)* the maintenance of quality and standards; *(b)* the provision of extra security by the insertion of a unique Portcullis watermark licensed to the House of Commons; *(c)* a reduction in cost and range of bespoke products; and *(d)* environmental concerns.

The hon. Lady will wish to note that the new paper is recycled from pre-consumer waste, typically using off cuts and reel ends from a previous manufacturing process.

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will report progress on the New Parliamentary Building. [58682]

Sir Sydney Chapman: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 578, in which I reported that it is planned that the House will be able to occupy the building from the beginning of 2001. That remains so and the estimated cost is also unchanged.

The contractor who is erecting the frame of the building has experienced delays, including the supply of concrete below the specified strength, which subsequently had to be cut out and replaced. As a consequence, some contingent time has been absorbed, but an analysis of the programme has identified ways of saving time if this should become necessary to secure the planned occupation date.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Mrs. Roe: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what progress has been made by the House of Commons Commission in selecting a candidate for the post of Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [59404]

Mr. Kirkwood: A report recommending to the House Elizabeth Filkin, at present Adjudicator for the Inland Revenue and for Customs and Excise and the DSS Contributions Agency, is being published at 3.30 pm today as HC 1143. Copies are available from the Vote Office.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the European Commission about assistance to Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [58344]

Clare Short: We have had frequent discussions in recent months with the European Commission about assistance to Afghanistan. We and they are extremely concerned about the security of expatriate personnel in Afghanistan, and about the constraints which the actions of the Taliban and other factions have imposed on assistance activities. Our common objective is to secure an improvement in conditions in Afghanistan which will allow for the principled and effective delivery of much needed humanitarian assistance.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Servants (Holidays)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how much holiday entitlement civil servants have been allowed to carry forward to their next holiday year; [59026]

(2) on what date a civil servant's year starts for holiday purposes; and what the normal holiday entitlement is for new starters; [59025]

(3) what changes have been made to holiday entitlement rules for civil servants because of the Working Time Regulations 1998. [59027]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Responsibility for determining holiday entitlement for staff was delegated to departments and agencies on 1 April 1996, except for the amount of annual leave in the Senior Civil Service. In general, holiday entitlement within the Civil Service meets or exceeds the limits set by the Working Time Regulations; it is expected that most civil servants will be unaffected by the

Regulations. Responsibility for decisions on whether any changes are required to comply with the Regulations lies with departments and agencies.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list those compliance cost assessments published during the latest six month period. [59094]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are necessary, give effective protection, balance cost and risk, are fair and command public confidence. In accordance with this, we require Departments to produce and publish CCAs for all regulatory proposals likely to have an impact on business.

I have presented to Parliament today a Command Paper listing 119 CCAs and regulatory appraisals incorporating CCAs published between 1 January 1998 and 30 June 1998. Also listed are 2 Regulatory Impact Assessments prepared in anticipation of the new guidance published on 10 August 1998. Copies of those listed have been placed in the libraries of the House. This is the ninth such Command Paper.

Civil Servants (Pensions)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people have been affected by the exclusion of Crown Service prior to 1975 in the calculation of their Civil Service pension; and what plans he has to introduce retrospective legislation. [58106]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Information on the numbers so affected, particularly given the lapse in time, is not available.

The Armed Forces pension scheme introduced arrangements, operative from 1 April 1975, which enable a transfer value representing accrued pension rights to be paid to another pension scheme. As with most improvements in pension arrangements, the change was not applied retrospectively. The Government have no plans for backdated changes to the Armed Forces (or other Crown service) pension arrangements.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Child Prostitution

Helen Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to ensure that judicial and magistrates' training programmes include training in awareness of the pressures on young people not to give evidence in cases involving child prostitution. [58328]

Mr. Hoon: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) which is an advisory non-departmental public body. The JSB also sets the syllabuses for, and monitors and evaluates the training of, lay magistrates.

No training is currently given specifically on awareness of the pressures on young people not to give evidence in cases involving child prostitution. The JSB, however, runs regular induction and continuation courses for both full-and part-time judges in the Crown Court as well as seminars on serious sexual offences. These courses include training on children as witnesses. All lay magistrates receive training on disadvantaged witnesses, including children, and those who sit in the Youth Court receive additional training in evaluating young people as witnesses.

Since January 1998 the JSB's Equal Treatment Advisory Committee has had the responsibility of advising the Board on all aspects of equal treatment training, including training on the needs of children. The Committee keeps the content of all JSB courses under review and is currently revising the guidance provided to all judges on equal treatment issues.

Internet Publishing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to require all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by his Department to publish their working papers and minutes on the Internet. [58774]

Mr. Hoon: Information will be published on the Internet wherever practical and appropriate. Many documents published by the Department already appear on the LCD website at www.open.gov.uk/lcd.

Libra

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects the Libra service to be fully operational in magistrates' courts *(a)* in Gloucestershire and *(b)* nationally. [57889]

Mr. Hoon: Subject to award of contract, I anticipate the Libra service will be implemented at the first Magistrates' Courts Committee towards the end of 2001. It will be for Gloucestershire Magistrates' Courts Committee, in consultation with the Department, to agree with the Libra supplier when the service should be implemented in Gloucestershire.

Defamation Act 1996

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 71, if he will list the dates when those parts of the Defamation Act 1996 not yet in force are to come into force; and when the attendant rules of court will become effective. [58153]

Mr. Hoon: I am not yet able to provide a list of dates but the remaining provisions will be brought into force as soon as reasonably practicable.

Civil Enforcement Agents

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost to his Department of the review of the organisation and management of civil enforcement agents from its inception until the publication of his Department's considered response; and what plans he has *(a)* to conduct further reviews and *(b)* to introduce revised policies with regard to civil enforcement agents. [58154]

Mr. Hoon: The Review was established in February 1992 and was concluded in April 1996. The work was undertaken by salaried officials and the cost was met from the Department's general running costs.

(a) On 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *141–42*, I announced the terms of reference and timetable for the Review of the Enforcement of Civil Court Judgments. This will include a review of the law governing the activities of bailiffs; and its second phase, commencing in July 2000, will include consideration of the type of agent or form of agency which should be responsible for carrying out enforcement.

(b) Changes to the Distress for Rent Rules 1988 governing the bailiff certification procedure are due to come into force next Spring.

The transfer of responsibilities for the enforcement of warrants from the police to the Magistrates' Courts Committees will take place when a suitable legislative opportunity arises. The Committees will be empowered to authorise companies and firms which will in turn issue employees with written authority to execute warrants.

Gloucestershire Magistrates Court

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of *(a)* the percentage of serious criminal cases being dealt with in Gloucestershire magistrates' courts within the 56 day performance indicator for each of the past five years and *(b)* the average delay in respect of collection of fines imposed by Gloucestershire magistrates' courts for each of the past five years. [57890]

Mr. Hoon: The information available is shown in the table.

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Percentage of serious criminal cases dealt with within 56 days in Gloucestershire[1]	60	56	60	61	64
Average delay in respect of collection of fines imposed by magistrates in Gloucestershire[2] (days)	275	264	242	272	297

[1] The figures given in the table are the percentage of defendants in Indictable/Triable Either Way cases. The interval quoted is First Listing to Completion.

[2] Average Debtor Days is the average time taken to enforce the collection of money owed to the court, including fines, fees, compensation awards and contributions to legal aid, not taking into account the delay between imposition and start of enforcement actions, known as 'time to pay'. The 1993–96 indicator values are artificially low because a proportion of the fines etc. which were imposed by magistrates would have been transferred out to other courts to collect, but were still included in the figures locally. The 1997 indicator shows a more accurate figure.

Source:

[1] TIS

[2] MIS

Conveyancing

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department when he plans to bring forward measures to reform the law affecting house purchase. [57751]

Mr. Hoon: My Department, together with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and Department of Trade and Industry, will be issuing a consultation paper shortly that will canvass a range of proposals for changes to the conveyancing process. It would be inappropriate to make a statement about reforms until the Government have had an opportunity to consider the results of that conclusion.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

China

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Council what representations the Government have made to the People's Republic of China regarding that country's maternal and infant health care law in respect of compulsory premarital check-ups. [57882]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

None. The health and development agencies of the United Nations—the World Health Organisation, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund—are working in China to secure respect for international standards of maternal and child health. The UK contributes to these programmes.

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Council (1) if she will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in her private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56789]

(2) if she will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in her Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56787]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Incinerator Emissions

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish a breakdown of the content of unauthorised emissions from United Kingdom incinerators since January 1996. [56746]

Mr. Meale: The table sets out the content of unauthorised releases into the environment since 1 January 1996 from the incinerators in England and Wales regulated by the Environment Agency under the Integrated Pollution Control regime.

Parameter	*Number of unauthorised releases*
Hydrogen Chloride	370
Particulate Matter	47
Oxides of Nitrogen	33
Carbon Monoxide	27
Sulphur Dioxide	9
Metals	7
Hydrogen Fluoride	4
Iodine	2

Estimates of the mass release, causes and likely environmental impact of each unauthorised release

have been reported to the Environment Agency under the terms of the operator's authorisations. Copies of the notifications will have been placed on the relevant Agency and local authority public registers, unless they are subject to commercial confidentiality arrangements provided for by the legislation.

No central record is kept of unauthorised releases from the smaller incinerators regulated by local authorities in England and Wales under the Local Air Pollution Control regime. However, details of any such releases will have been entered on the relevant local authority public register.

For details of unauthorised releases from incinerators in Scotland and Northern Ireland, I refer the hon. Gentlemen to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish a breakdown of emissions from *(a)* the Edmonton and *(b)* the Lewisham incinerators since January 1996. [56748]

Mr. Meale: Data on emissions from the Edmonton (London Waste Ltd.) and Lewisham (SELCHP) incinerators have already been published and are regularly updated. The data are available on public registers; either the Environment Agency's public register, Kings Meadow House, Kings Meadow Road, Reading or the local authority registers at Enfield and Lewisham Borough Council respectively.

Information is also held centrally by the Agency on its Chemical Releases Inventory and the following table gives details of annual emissions from these two sites for 1996 and 1997. Details of the monitoring results on which these annual returns are based can be found on the public registers.

Edmonton Incinerator

Substance	*Actual Emissions 1996 (Kgs)*	*Actual Emissions 1997 (Kgs)*
Atrazine	0.0559	0.0700
Cadmium	3.8000	6.0100
Carbon Monoxide	276000.0000	330000.0000
Dichlorvos	0.0311	0.0300
Dieldrin	0.0138	0.0100
Fenitrothion	0.0332	0.0300
Hexachlorobenzene	0.0081	0.0100
Hexachlorobutadiene	0.0081	0.0081
Hexachlorocyclohexane	0.0088	0.0100
Hydrogen Chloride	2070000.0000	24800.0000
Hydrogen Fluoride	1487.0000	1800.0000
Mercury (to water)	0.1850	0.1200
Mercury (to air)	60.3000	139.0000
Metals—Group 3 (AS+CR+CU+MN+NI+PB+2N)	57.2000	1100.0000
Nitrogen Oxides (as NO2)	478000.0000	588000.0000
Organic Tin Compounds	0.0340	0.0300
Particulates	263000.0000	21900.0000
Pentachlorophenol Compounds	0.1080	0.0400
Polychlorinated Biphenyls	0.0300	0.0400
Simazine	0.0538	0.0700
Sulphur Dioxide	250000.0000	30700.0000
TEQ (Toxic Equivalent of PCDD + PCDF)	0.0055	0.0003
Trichlorobenzene—all isomers	0.0308	0.0400
Triflualin	0.0081	0.0100
Volatile Organic Compounds	1570.0000	11900.0000

Lewisham Incinerator

Substance	*Actual Emissions 1996 (Kgs)*	*Actual Emissions 1997 (Kgs)*
Cadmium	3.0000	12.1000
Carbon Monoxide	26500.0000	23400.0000
Hydrogen Chloride	15140.0000	27360.0000
Hydrogen Fluoride	80.0000	112.70000
Mercury	60.0000	40.3000
Metals—Group 3 (AS+CR+CU+MN+NI+PB+SN)	340.0000	57.7000
Nitrogen Oxides (as NO2)	986000.0000	914400.0000
Particulates	14610.0000	14000.0000
Polychlorinated Dibenzo-P-Dioxin—All congeners	0.00014	0.00003
Sulphur Dioxide	13440.0000	10640.0000
Volatile Organic Compounds	6150.0000	6342.0000

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997; [56808]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997. [56810]

Mr. Meale: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70.*

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the safety of the packaging and containerisation of raw intermediate level waste for storage since March 1997. [57098]

Mr. Meale: None. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regulates the safety of Intermediate Level Waste (ILW) storage on sites licensed under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 (as amended). HSE policy is that raw ILW should be conditioned into a passively safe form as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so. The HSE required that the research necessary to support the safety of the licensees' operations, which includes the storage of raw, packaged and containerised intermediate level wastes, is carried out by or on behalf of its licensees. The HSE has not commissioned or evaluated any research into the packaging and containerisation of raw ILW for storage since March 1997.

Lobbyists

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* dates of meetings between Paul Hackett and Derek Draper since 2 May 1997. [58004]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), on 31 July 1998, *Official Report,* columns *606–07.*

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what work Paul Hackett has carried out for the Cranfield Institute of Management since 2 May 1997. [58005]

Mr. Caborn: Paul Hackett is a Fellow of Cranfield University School of Management and Director of the Cranfield Partnership Research Institute. These posts are a matter for the Cranfield University School of Management.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the carbon modelling consortium research showing potential absorption of carbon dioxide by carbon sink young trees; and if he will make a statement. [57878]

Mr. Meale: A preliminary assessment by the Hadley Centre of recently published research by the carbon modelling consortium suggests that the uptake of carbon by forests in North America may have been overestimated in this study. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is currently producing a special report on land use change and forestry issues to be published in 2000, and a full review of all relevant research on the global uptake of carbon by vegetation will be published by the Panel in its Third Assessment Report in early 2001.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy on the inclusion of absorption of carbon dioxide by carbon sink young trees in the Kyoto emission reduction negotiations between the European Union and the United States of America. [57879]

Mr. Meale: The Kyoto Protocol allows the uptake in the commitment period, 2008 to 2012, of carbon by trees planted since 1990 to be taken into account in meeting commitments to limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The text of the Protocol makes it clear that the natural regrowth of trees cannot be counted against commitments. Our policy is to ensure that the detailed rules on implementation of the Protocol reflect the fundamental principles agreed in Kyoto.

Countryside Access

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish his Department's analysis of the responses to the consultation paper, Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales. [57858]

Mr. Meacher: The Government expect to publish their analysis of responses to the consultation paper shortly.

A14

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what have been the recorded levels of traffic on the A14 (A1-M1 link road) from the opening of the road to date. [58082]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Recorded average annual daily (24 hour) traffic flows on the A14 (M1-A1 Link Road) from the opening of the last section on 15 July 1994 (between M1/M6 and A6) to date indicate the following:

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
M1/M6 to A6 at Rothwell	31,000	[1]—	36,000
Kettering Southern Bypass	45,000	[1]—	52,000
Thrapston to A1	29,300	29,900	33,000

[1] Traffic counters were not available during part of the year—hence no accurate figures are available

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the projected traffic flows on the A14 (A1-M1 link road) at the time of the construction of the road. [58083]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Projected average annual daily (24 hour) traffic flows on the A14 (M1-A1) Link Road, forecast during the planning stages of the road, were:

	On opening	*By 2007*
M1/M6 to A6 Rothwell	24,000	33,000
Kettering Southern Bypass	27,000	44,000
Thrapston to A1	21,000	35,000

Rothwell/Desborough Bypass

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce the start date for the construction of the Rothwell/Desborough bypass. [58085]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are currently considering the construction programme for the schemes included in our Targeted Programme of Improvements listed in A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England.

A43, Geddington

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to de-trunk the A43 through Geddington, Northamptonshire. [58080]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The proposal to de-trunk the A43 through Geddington is subject to consultation with the local highway authority (Northamptonshire County Council). No timetable has been set for the process but we hope to begin negotiations shortly.

Cyclists

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps will be taken to curb the number of accidents arising from cyclists using the pavement. [58197]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government intend to extend the scope of the Fixed Penalty Notice regime to cover the offence of cycling on the footway. This measure will help streamline enforcement procedures, and act as a deterrent to illegal behaviour by cyclists.

We are encouraging all local highway authorities to improve conditions on the road for cycling. Better provision for cyclists should help reduce the incidence of cycling on the pavement. We are updating our advice to local authorities on the design and layout of facilities, such as cycle tracks, shared by cyclists and pedestrians.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guarantees Bechtel has provided in respect of the completion of the Jubilee Line extension on time; and what are the penalty provisions. [58203]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Responsibility for completing the Jubilee Line Extension on time remains with London Transport, as has been the case since the start of the project. The contract with Bechtel contains incentives for earlier completion of the Extension and penalty provisions for lateness. Details of these arrangements are commercially confidential.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what tender process was carried out to appoint a project manager following the conclusion of the feasibility study into the Jubilee Line extension that the original management team would not be able to complete the project on time. [58201]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Bechtel's study recommended that a fresh approach be taken for the commissioning stage of the project, to enhance confidence that the line would open in good time for the Millennium Exhibition. Following consideration of the study's findings, London Transport appointed the company to provide resources to strengthen and refocus the project management team accordingly. This was done with regard to European Union procurement rules allowing derogation, where urgency in the procurement process can be demonstrated.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much was paid to Bechtel to carry out their feasibility study into whether the construction of the Jubilee Line extension could be completed to deadline. [58200]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Transport invited two companies to make proposals for a feasibility study and, having seen the proposals, selected Bechtel. The level of fee is commercially confidential.

Air Traffic Control, Prestwick

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the contract for the development of the new air traffic control system at Prestwick will be signed before all major software flaws are rectified in the Swanwick system. [58216]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* NATS have assured the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee that no binding agreement with Sky Solutions would be signed until it was sure that the software at NERC could be made to work. Since then, the system has passed its acceptance tests, and preliminary findings by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) have concluded that there is no substantive reason to doubt that it will work.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the contractual dependencies between the contracts for the Swanwick and Prestwick developments. [58218]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* There are no contractual dependencies between the Swanwick and Prestwick contracts.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the contract with Lockheed-Martin for the development of the new air traffic control system at Prestwick will be signed. [58215]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* Negotiations between National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS) and Sky Solutions, the preferred bidder for the New Scottish air traffic control centre (NSC) at Prestwick, are nearing completion. NATS will then approach the Government for approval of the contract before it can be signed.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if there is a deadline by which the contract for the development of the new air traffic control system at Prestwick has to have been signed. [58217]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* No deadline has been set, but the Government are keen to see the development of the NSC in good time to avoid significant delays to air traffic over Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Swanwick

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on Swanwick of entering into a public-private partnership agreement for NATS; and if he will put a copy of his Department's assessments in the Library. [58219]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The Government are currently consulting on the details of the proposed public/private partnership for NATS. In consequence, no decision has been taken on the timing or details of any sale. NATS intends to bring the Swanwick centre into service at the earliest opportunity consistent with maintaining the safety of the system and meeting the requirements of its customers.

Railway Track (Wales)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what sections of the railway track between *(a)* Carmarthen and Aberystwyth, *(b)* Pencader and Llandysul, *(c)* Carmarthen and Newcastle Emlyn and *(d)* Lampeter and Aberavon are no longer in public ownership; and what is the total mileage of those sections. [58436]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The British Rail Board has retained ownership of Pencader, Bryn Teify and Caradog Falls Tunnels since it is statutorily responsible for their maintenance. The collective lengths of these tunnels amount to less than one mile.

The remaining sections of track were sold several years ago, mainly to adjoining land owners including public bodies such as the Forestry Commission and local authorities.

More detailed information is not immediately available but I shall write to the hon. Member expanding on this in the near future.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunals

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to what extent the Leasehold Valuation Tribunals Service is understaffed; and how many staff have *(a)* left the Leasehold Valuation Tribunals Service, *(b)* been redeployed and *(c)* been made redundant in the last year. [58443]

Mr. Raynsford: The provision of Leasehold Valuation Tribunals is one of the functions of Rent Assessment Panels. The workload of a number of Panels has reduced over the last 12 months and adjustments have been made to staffing numbers as a result. The current staffing levels are considered sufficient to carry out the administration of the tribunals but we are keeping the position under review. The administrative staff are civil servants from my Department and, of the 21 staff who have left the Panels over the last 12 months, 7 have transferred to other posts in the Department, 3 have resigned, 10 have taken early retirement and 1 member of staff was dismissed. No staff have been made redundant and 17 new staff have been recruited to the Panel in the same 12 month period.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many appeals have been notified in respect of leasehold valuation tribunal decisions in the past year; what assessment he has made of the quality of the work of the tribunals; and if he will make a statement. [58442]

Mr. Raynsford: In the 12 months ending on 31 October, the Leasehold Valuation Tribunals (LVTs) have been asked for leave to appeal gainst 7 of their decisions in respect of service charge disputes. In total, 58 appeals against LVT decisions have been received by the Lands Tribunal during the same period—this latter figure includes both service charge cases and decisions on other matters for which leave to appeal is not required.

The Leasehold Valuation Tribunals have provided an effective means of resolving a variety of disputes relating to leasehold property without the risks of high and uncertain costs associated with court proceedings. They have recently been given a new role in hearing service charge disputes and applications for the appointment of a manager under which they have, as yet, decided only a few cases. We are commissioning research to examine the effectiveness of the new regime, both directly and indirectly, in dealing with service charge disputes and we will continue to monitor their operation closely.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the budget for the leasehold valuation tribunals in each financial year since 1995; and what it will be for the year 1999–2000. [58444]

Mr. Raynsford: The cost of leasehold valuation tribunals is not separately identifiable within the overall cost of Rent Assessment Panels. The cost of the Panels in 1997–98 was £5.5 million. The resources allocated to the Panels in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 have been increased to £11.1 million in both years in anticipation of an increase in the volume of applications to leasehold valuation tribunals arising from the provisions in the Housing Act 1996.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the average length of time before the cases of applicants to the Leasehold Valuation Tribunals were heard *(a)* in the present financial year to date, *(b)* in 1997–98 and *(c)* in 1996–97. [58437]

Mr. Raynsford: The average length of time before the cases of applicants to the Leasehold Valuation Tribunals were heard was as follows:

New jurisdiction cases (Service charges/Appointment of a manager/Insurance)

Panel	*1996–97* [1]	*1997–98* [1]	*1998–99 (to date)*
Wales	n/a	No cases received	No cases received
North Western	n/a	No cases heard	11 months
Chilterns, Thames and Eastern	n/a	No cases heard	No cases
London	n/a	No cases heard	8 months
Merseyside and Cheshire	n/a	No cases heard	No cases received
West Midland	n/a	4 months	6 months
North Eastern	n/a	No cases received	4 months
East Midland	n/a	No cases heard	No cases heard
South Western	n/a	No cases heard	7.5 months
Southern and South Eastern	n/a	No cases heard	9 months

[1] An application to a leasehold valuation tribunal could be made only on or after 1 September 1997.

Old jurisdiction cases—(Enfranchisement/lease extensions)

Panel	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99 (to date)*
Wales	7 months	7.5 months	9 months
North Western	None heard	10 months	12 months
Chilterns, Thames and Eastern	8 months	8 months	9 months
London	8 months	8 months	8 months
Merseyside and Cheshire	No cases received	No cases received	No cases received
West Midland	4 months	7 months	6 months
North Eastern	8.5 months	All cases withdrawn or no jurisdiction	No cases heard
East Midland	No cases received	No cases heard	No cases received
South Western	4.5 months	No cases heard	11 months
Southern and South Eastern	4 months	4 months	4.5 months

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide a breakdown of the backgrounds of the members of the leasehold valuation tribunals; what expertise is sought for appointments; and what training is given *(a)* on appointment and *(b)* subsequently. [58445]

Mr. Raynsford: Leasehold valuation tribunals comprise qualified lawyers and valuers, and lay people, all drawn from the members appointed to the 9 Rent Assessment Panels in England. I have arranged for a copy of the current list of Panel members, which includes details of their backgrounds, to be placed in the Library. My Department is looking to recruit more lay people and to attract members from a broader constituency. The qualities looked for in members include relevant professional expertise, intellectual grasp, sound judgment, analytical skills, ability to work as a team member and, in the case of a chairman of a tribunal, the ability to control proceedings. On appointment, new members are subject to an induction programme, which includes the provision of guidance on the legislation and procedures relevant to tribunal work, attendance at tribunal hearings as an observer, ad hoc meetings on specific subjects and attendance on suitable courses where appropriate. This is supplemented by regular seminars for all members and the supply of guidance notes on legal, technical and procedural issues as they arise.

Leasehold Reform

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Green Paper on leasehold reform will address the question of social housing leaseholders. [58438]

Mr. Raynsford: Our consultation paper will seek views on a wide range of leasehold issues affecting social housing leaseholders and leaseholders generally.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations his Department has received on leasehold reform; and if he will make a statement. [58545]

Mr. Raynsford: We have received a large number of representations on leasehold reform. We are currently conducting a comprehensive review of the leasehold system and are committed to thoroughgoing reform.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department proposes to publish the Green Paper on Leasehold Reform. [58544]

Mr. Raynsford: We hope to issue our consultation paper on leasehold reform shortly.

Driving Licence Sight Tests

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under the proposed amendments to the Motor Vehicle (Driving Licences) Regulations 1996, what assumptions underlie the estimate of the savings if the work were undertaken by opticians. [58281]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The savings are based on the difference between the fees payable to doctors and specialists from April 1999 and an estimate on the costs provided by Opticians to undertake similar volumes of tests to an identical standard.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what fee is currently paid to the doctor or eye specialist when the Medical Adviser at the DVLA requests that a driver take a sight test to determine his fitness to drive. [58282]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The statutory eyesight standard for driving is the ability to read a car number plate at 20.5 metres. To establish if a driver's field of vision can meet the standard DVLA will pay a doctor or eye specialist a fee of £12.50 for a report from records or £56.25 if an examination is required.

Construction Industry (Fatal Accidents)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the number of fatal accidents within the construction industry in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [58326]

Mr. Meale: The numbers of fatal accidents reported to the Health and Safety Executive and Local Authorities within the construction industry in England and Wales in each of the last three years are as follows:

Year	*Number of fatal accidents*
1995–96	68
1996–97	78
1997–98[1]	69

[1] Provisional data

Alcohol (Air Passengers)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government will introduce legislation to ban the consumption of passengers' own alcohol in flight. [58416]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* The Government have no plans to introduce such legislation.

The problem of drunken passengers is already dealt with in the Air Navigation (No 2) Order 1995. This makes it an offence to enter an aircraft while drunk, to be drunk on an aircraft and to endanger the safety of an aircraft or any person therein. This legislation applies to UK registered aircraft regardless of where in the world they are and to foreign aircraft in UK airspace or whose next landing is in the UK. In addition, the commander of an UK registered aircraft may require a passenger not to consume alcohol if it appears that he is likely to become drunk. Failure to comply with the lawful commands of the aircraft commander is an offence.

More generally, there are various actions which the airlines themselves can take to deal with the problem of potentially disruptive passengers and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport will be discussing these options with the airlines shortly.

Greater London Authority

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of respondents to the consultation exercise on the proposed Greater London Authority supported the additional member system of electing the authority. [58482]

Mr. Raynsford: Our proposals to elect the Assembly by AMS were set out in the White Paper "A Mayor and Assembly for London" (Cm 3897). These proposals were endorsed by 72 per cent. of those who voted in the referendum on 7 May 1998.

We received a total of 1,289 responses to the consultation exercise on the Green Paper "New Leadership for London" (Cm 3724). Of these, 103 respondents favoured a system of proportional representation to elect the Assembly, as opposed to 33 who supported first past the post. Nine respondents specifically supported the additional member system (AMS).

Rail Services

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many routes the punctuality of rail services *(a)* improved and *(b)* deteriorated in the last period for which records are available. [58672]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The latest figures released by the Franchising Director cover the three rail industry periods from 28 June 1998 to 19 September 1998. Comparing the annual average at the end of the quarter with the average of the beginning of the quarter, 26 route groups have shown an improvement, 32 have deteriorated and six remained static. Comparing average punctuality for the year ending September 1998 with that for the previous year, 19 route groups have improved, 42 have declined and three have remained static.

M20

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received about noise from the M20 through Ashford; and if he will make a statement. [58356]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* Since the Roads Review was announced in July 1998 we have received 65 representations and one petition containing over 50 signatures about traffic noise from the M20 within the District of Ashford (between Charing and Brabourne Lees).

We recognise that traffic noise is a major source of concern to people. This is why in "A New Deal for Trunk Road in England" we announced that low noise surfaces would be used when roads are built or, where appropriate in those areas where noise is a particular concern, when they undergo major maintenance. I understand the Highways Agency plan to carry out technical surveys between Junctions 9 and 11 on the M20 later this year, which should determine the condition of the road surface and establish whether it should be included in the Agency's programme of future maintenance work.

We also announced our intention, where re-surfacing cannot be justified on normal maintenance grounds, to establish a revised noise criteria and ring-fenced annual budget to enable the Highways Agency, over a reasonable period of time, to deal with some of the most serious and pressing cases.

North West Trains

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has had on the performance of North West Trains towards meeting the standards agreed on its franchise. [58692]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Since the General Election the Franchising Director and I have received 232 representations about the performance and service quality of North West Trains.

Civil Subsonic Jet Aircraft

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy towards the proposed EU directive on civil subsonic jet aircraft. [58582]

Ms Glenda Jackson: To gain the benefits of early implementation the measure has been transformed into a Regulation which the UK supported when it was agreed at the Transport Council on 1 October as reported in the Parliamentary Answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport on 20 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *1099–101*. It is essential to maintain progress in reducing aircraft noise at source. This measure will help to ensure that the environmental gains achieved by the phasing out of older, noisy Chapter 2 aircraft by 2002 are not lost.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the dates on which research has been commissioned by his Department, or its predecessor, into contained genetically modified organisms and their possible impacts on the environment if released; and if he will place a copy of the findings of such research in the Library. [59029]

Mr. Meale: The Department has commissioned research into contained genetically modified organisms and their possible impacts on the environment as follows:

December 1994, The Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research, a study to review current large-scale activities with genetically modified microorganisms in the UK and the potential for any environmental risks arising from incidental discharge in waste streams.

October 1997, the Central Science Laboratory, to study the environmental risk of genetically modified plants in containment.

The reports of these studies will be published in due course and copies will be placed in the library.

Atmospheric Pollution

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions in each month, or other period for which the information is available since 1 May 1997 WHO guidelines for atmospheric pollution levels have been exceeded. [59016]

Mr. Meale: Air pollution data from national monitoring sites, from 1 May 1997, for four pollutants (nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone and sulphur dioxide) for which WHO have set guidelines, is presented in the tables. It should be noted that data are provisional from 1 April 1998.

Nitrogen dioxide
WHO 1-hour mean>=110.ppb

Month	*Number of exceedences*	*Number of days*	*Maximum hourly ppb*
May 1997	3	1	121
June 1997	2	2	249
July 1997	3	2	150
August 1997	4	4	144
September 1997	6	6	217
October 1997	35	3	249
November 1997	25	8	156
December 1997	6	3	154
January 1998	6	5	134
February 1998	9	7	132
April 1998	2	2	124
May 1998	3	3	122
June 1998	1	1	119
August 1998	3	3	123
October 1998	5	4	598
November 1998	1	1	190

Carbon monoxide
WHO 1-hour mean>=25.0ppm

Month	*Number of exceedences*	*Number of days*	*Maximum ppm*
October 1998	4	4	48.8

Carbon monoxide
WHO 8-hour running average>=10.0ppm

Month	*Number of exceedences*	*Number of days*	*Maximum ppm*
October 1997	2	2	12.1
November 1997	1	1	12.1
January 1998	4	4	11
October 1998	3	3	47.1

Ozone
WHO 8-hour running average>=60.0ppb

Month	*Number of exceedences*	*Number of days*	*Maximum ppb*
May 1997	51	8	80
June 1997	28	6	77
July 1997	47	9	83
August 1997	204	14	100
April 1998	1	1	64
May 1998	78	16	84
June 1998	11	2	72
July 1998	1	1	60
August 1998	34	4	101
September 1998	6	5	71
October 1998	10	9	72
November 1998	1	1	65

Sulphur Dioxide
WHO 24-hour running average>=44.0ppb

Month	*Number of exceedences*	*Number of days*	*Maximum ppb*
July 1997	3	3	82
September 1997	1	1	45
October 1997	9	8	78
November 1997	16	12	94
December 1997	8	6	92
January 1998	22	12	93
February 1998	2	2	56
May 1998	9	6	66
July 1998	2	2	65
September 1998	7	7	89
October 1998	2	2	47

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each month or other period for which the information is available since 1 May 1997, the total quantity of *(a)* CO_2, *(b)* CO, *(c)* benzene, *(d)* sulphur, *(e)* NO_x and *(f)* particulates emitted by road traffic, broken down by (i) car, (ii) motorcycle, (iii) van and (iv) lorry. [59013]

Mr. Meale: National UK emissions data are published annually in my Department's "Digest of Environmental Statistics", copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. UK emissions data are also available on the Department's air quality web site at http://www.environment.detr.gov.uk/airq/aqinfo.htm and in the annual research report "UK Emissions of Air Pollutants", produced by the National Environmental Technology Centre. Annual UK emissions data are not yet available for 1997. A table showing the latest available published UK annual road transport emissions for 1996 follows.

UK emissions from road transport in 1996
Figures report by the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory for UK Digest of Environmental Statistics

Ktonnes	*NO_x*	*CO*	*SO_2*	*Benzene*	*PM_{10}*	*CO_2* as C
Cars	523	2,798	14.6	23.0	13.2	19,324
Vans	58	306	5.1	1.5	8.1	3,329
HGVs	321	85	14.5	1.4	21.5	6,904
Buses	63	41	3.0	0.3	4.6	1,443
Motorcycles	1	70	0.1	0.2	0.4	118
All vehicles	966	3,299	37.2	26.3	47.7	31,118

Internet Publishing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to require all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by his Department to publish their working papers and minutes on the Internet. [58769]

Mr. Meale: Given the wide range of subjects and sensitivities involved, it would not be appropriate to publish on the Internet the working papers and minutes of all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by my Department. However, in line with the Department's commitment to Open Government, Task Forces' reports will be made available on the Internet where appropriate, and any requests for additional information will be dealt with individually under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Development Rights

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is his Department's policy towards permitted development rights on green belt land held by recently privatised companies, with particular reference to Railtrack; [58997]

(2) what is his Department's policy towards development in the green belt under permitted development rights. [59000]

Mr. Raynsford: Permitted development rights may be exercised in accordance with the various conditions and limitations set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. In exceptional circumstances, where there is a real and specific threat that permitted development is likely to take place which could damage an interest of acknowledged importance those rights can be withdrawn and the relevant development would then require a planning application. This would apply regardless of the type of developer. One reason for withdrawing permitted development rights might be that the purposes of Green Belt designation were threatened.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what responsibilities for consultations Railtrack inherited from British Rail regarding use of permitted development rights. [58999]

Mr. Raynsford: British Rail had no specific responsibilities for consultations regarding the use of permitted development rights. However, guidance for non-statutory consultation with regard to the exercise of permitted development rights by statutory undertakers is set out in DOE Circular 9/95: General Development Order Consolidation 1995, and in DOE Circular 15/92: Publicity for Planning Applications. They make it clear that both the local planning authorities and the public should be informed of proposals for permitted development which are likely to affect them significantly, before the proposals are finalised.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about Railtrack's proposals to build a ballast storage depot at Hinkley Sidings under permitted development rights. [58994]

Mr. Raynsford: As of 5 November, the Government Office for the South East had received 30 representations from local people, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith).

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy towards the payment of compensation by a planning authority to private companies when their permitted development rights are blocked by use of an Article 4 direction upheld by his Department. [59001]

Mr. Raynsford: The withdrawal of permitted development rights by a direction under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 may give rise to the local planning authority being liable to pay compensation under sections 107 and 108 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Any person interested in the land, or in any minerals in or under the land, may seek compensation for abortive expenditure, or other loss or damage directly attributable to the withdrawal of the permitted development rights. In order to claim compensation a planning application must have been made and permission refused, or granted subject to conditions other than those previously imposed by the Permitted Development Order.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what responsibilities for environmental protection and what requirements to have regard for greenbelt policies were inherited by Railtrack from British Rail with regard to permitted development rights. [58998]

Mr. Raynsford: There were no specific responsibilities of this kind. It is the responsibility of the local planning authority to decide whether to withdraw certain permitted development rights where permitted developments are likely to have significant effects on the environment. I would refer the hon. Member to my earlier answers to questions 58997 and 59000.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to make a decision regarding the Article 4 direction from Oxfordshire County Council regarding the proposal to build a ballast depot at Hinkley Sidings. [58995]

Mr. Raynsford: A decision will be made as quickly as possible.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department received the Article 4 direction from Oxfordshire County Council relating to Hinkley sidings. [58996]

Mr. Raynsford: The request to confirm the Article 4 Direction was received from Oxfordshire County Council on 2 November.

Freight

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the development of new rail routes for freight transport. [59223]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The freight grants scheme is designed to assist companies in moving goods from road to rail where payment is justified by the environmental benefits. We overhauled the grants scheme on coming to office; we doubled the grant spend in our first year to £30 million; we have increased the budget to £40 million for the current year, of which £32 million is already committed; and we will make still further money available over the next three years, if there is demand.

Road Schemes

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what weighting is given to the individual criteria and sub-criteria in the appraisal summary tables for road schemes published following the roads review. [58700]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Explicit weightings were not given to the criteria and sub-criteria in the Roads Review.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each local authority in England the bids made in their TPP submission for expenditure in 1992–2000 for *(a)* major highway schemes (eligible for TSG), *(b)* major highway schemes (not eligible for TSG), *(c)* structural maintenance on carriageways, *(d)* strengthening and structural maintenance on bridges, *(e)* assessment programme on bridges, *(f)* major public transport packages, *(g)* minor works: packages, *(h)* minor works: non-packages and *(i)* minor works: local safety schemes. [58701]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I shall be glad to provide the hon. Member with this information. In view of its extent I will provide it by letter rather than including it in the *Official Report*. I will write to him shortly. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Airports

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish a policy document on airports. [58528]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In its White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", the Government said:

"We will prepare a UK airports policy looking some 30 years ahead. This will develop the application to UK airports of the policies set out in this White Paper—of sustainable development, integration with surface transport and contribution to regional growth. It will provide the framework within which those concerned can plan for the future with greater certainty. We will consult widely in preparing the new policy and will take account of the Inspector's report on the Heathrow Terminal 5 inquiry."

The Government are currently considering the precise scope, and the timing, of the policy statement and will announce their conclusions in due course. They will also consider what steps might be taken to develop thinking and focus the debate on the way forward.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of freight facilities grant was applied to inland waterways in the period since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [58873]

Ms Glenda Jackson: 23 Freight Facilities Grants totalling some £19 million have been awarded since 1 May 1997. Two of the grants, worth about £240,000, were awarded to inland waterway applicants.

Interest in grant for inland waterway schemes has historically been low. However, recent publicity drives by my Department have resulted in an increased interest in moving freight by inland waterway.

We intend to consult on the details of a scheme to extend, the freight grants regime to coastal and short sea shipping.

Commission for Integrated Transport

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce the *(a)* membership of and *(b)* terms of reference for the Commission for Integrated Transport. [58697]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The remit for the Commission for Integrated Transport was set out in paragraph 4.4 of the White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport'. We expect to announce the appointments to the Commission early in the new year.

Unpaid Utility Charges (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people resident in the Warrington, North constituency who received a court summons for unpaid water charges in each of the past five years; [58314]

(2) how many *(a)* gas, *(b)* electricity and *(c)* water disconnections took place in the Warrington, North constituency in each of the past five years. [58315]

Mr. Meale: Information is not available by constituency and my Department has made no estimated constituency breakdown of the information. Available figures provided by the utility regulators are as follows:

Year	*Gas disconnections*
1993	16,088
1994	16,393
1995	14,511
1996	8,820
1997	29,771

Note:

Figures, from OFGAS, are for Great Gritain; regional breakdowns are not available.

Year	Electricity disconnections
1993–94	23
1994–95	27
1995–96	30
1996–97	8
1997–98	7

Note:
Figures, from OFFER, are for the MANWEB area.

Year	Water Summonses	Disconnections
1993–94	41,345	515
1994–95	55,065	649
1995–96	43,842	839
1996–97	43,716	410
1997–98	6,482	469

Note:
Figures, from OFWAT, are for North West Water; the figures for summonses are for household customers only.

Repair Work (Northern Line)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects repair work on the Northern Line escalator at Embankment Station to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the cause of delay. [58317]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Embankment Station escalator number 4, an up escalator from the Northern Line dating back to 1985, suffered a major component failure in September 1998. As the escalator type is now obsolete no replacement parts were readily available. At this time however a similar type of escalator was being replaced at Paddington and a decision was taken to attempt to cannibalise this machine and work was carried out between September to mid-October. Upon completion of work London Underground Limited's (LUL) Chief Engineer (Lifts and Escalators) examined the escalator. Unfortunately because the parts from the Paddington escalator were worn and could not comply with LUL's very strict standard, the machine could not return to service.

Since failing in September (and obviously during repair work) the escalator had been covered by hoarding. In a bid to assist passenger flow through the station the hoarding has been removed and the escalator is currently in use as a fixed stairway.

Work is well underway to replace the failed escalator. A contract, worth approximately £1 million has been placed with the lift and escalator manufacturer Otis, which will commence work on installing a brand new escalator in January 1999. (The lead-in time for major components is between 12 and 16 weeks). It is expected that the new escalator will be fully operational by the end of July 1999.

Interconnector

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations his Department had with the Directorate of Safety, Environment and Fire Policy at the Ministry of Defence, prior to giving consent for the laying of the Scotland-Northern Ireland electricity interconnector. [58710]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Consent was sought from the Department under Section 34 of the Coast Protection Act 1949. Consent under this Act is required if danger or obstruction to navigation is likely to result. The Department in making a decision under this section may consider only this question. It was concluded that the laying of the interconnector was not likely to cause such danger or obstruction and consent was accordingly given in February 1994.

Minerals Planning Guidance 3

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish a revised version of planning document MPG3: Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal. [58709]

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning published a draft revised MPG3 (Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal) for public consultation on 16 October. Comments on the draft guidance, which applies to England only, are requested by 15 January 1999.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland published draft revised planning policy guidance on opencast coal in Scotland on 23 October. Responses to that consultation paper are requested by 11 December 1998.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what contingency plans have been made to get visitors to and from the Dome in the event that the Jubilee Line extension is not completed in time. [57279]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government welcome London Transport's revised strategy for phased opening of the Jubilee Line Extension project and their confirmation that it will open in good time for the Millennium Experience. It would however be irresponsible not to have in place contingency arrangements to manage problems on any of the main transport links to the Millennium site, including any major failure of the Jubilee Line. London Underground Limited are developing contingency arrangements for this, and other eventualities, in association with London Transport Buses, London River Services, the Government Office for London, the Highways Agency, the Association of Train Operating Companies, Connex South East, Docklands Light Railways and the New Millennium Experience Company.

Road Deaths

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many road deaths and serious road accidents there were in each month or other period for which the information is available since 1 May 1997. [59015]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Information for 1998 is not yet available by month. Information for 1997 is as shown. Other casualties involved in these accidents who sustained slight injuries are not shown.

Accidents

	Fatal incidents	*Serious accidents*
May	272	3,034
June	263	3,058
July	266	3,256
August	296	3,120
September	268	2,893
October	295	3,331
November	331	3,244
December	287	3,147

Casualties

	Persons killed	*Persons seriously injured*
May	292	3,595
June	289	3,633
July	304	3,867
August	320	3,785
September	291	3,362
October	321	3,924
November	354	3,848
December	310	3,697

Car Sales

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many cars were sold in each month, or other period for which the information is available, since 1 May 1997. [59014]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The requested information, taken from DVLA records of new car registrations, is as shown.

New car registrations: by month since May 1997

Thousand

	1997	*1998*
January	—	227
February	—	179
March	—	214
April	—	170
May	167	172
June	149	170
July	36	40
August	526	506
September	157	166
October	158	—
November	153	—
December	89	—

Car Journeys

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many car journeys were completed in each month or other period for which the information is available since 1 May 1997. [59017]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is not available on a monthly basis. Information on journeys is provided by the National Travel Survey. Over the period 1995 to 1997, the estimated average number of car driver journeys was 401 per person per year in Great Britain.

White Paper Documents

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he expects each of the subsidiary documents referred to in the White Paper, A New Deal For Transport, to be published; [58527]

(2) when the publications listed in annex A of A New Deal for Transport will be published. [58698]

Mr. Prescott: The Government will launch their consultation on road user charging and the workplace parking levy shortly. In the following months we intend to issue further daughter documents on sustainable distribution, local transport plans, shipping, buses, road safety and inland waterways. We will also be issuing a paper on ports policy. In many of the documents we will be consulting on detailed aspects of policy, and we therefore intend to issue the documents in an orderly way so as not to overburden consultees and so as to encourage full and considered responses.

Of the other relevant documents listed in Annex A, the response to the Royal Commission and the consultation paper on climate change have already been published. An action plan to encourage walking will be published shortly. The remaining documents—a report on the review of national air quality strategy, a revised strategy for sustainable development, consultation on draft or updated planning guidance, and progress reports from the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force—will follow over the next few months.

Regional Planning Guidance (Transport)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is the *(a)* timetable and *(b)* budget for the transport problems to be considered by regional planning conferences through regional planning guidance systems detailed in Annex C of A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England; [58694]

(2) what is the *(a)* timetable and *(b)* budget for the study programme detailed in annex D of A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England; [58695]

(3) what is the procedure for the implementation of recommendations made by the *(a)* regional planning conferences and *(b)* study programme listed in annexes C and D of A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England. [58696]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A New Deal for Transport and A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England describe the enhanced role that Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) will play in integrating transport planning with other types of land-use planning and identifying regional priorities for transport investment and management. Draft RPG will be prepared by regional planning conferences (RPCs), in consultation with the Government Offices and other regional stakeholders, and submitted to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will consider whether the draft should be modified in the light of an independent Panel report and issue the final version of RPG. The Secretary of State will be committed to taking forward those transport proposals in RPG for which central government are responsible. The precise timing will

depend on the circumstances of the particular public expenditure round. Other transport proposals will be delivered by local authorities through their local transport plans and by Railtrack and other transport infrastructure and service providers. Further guidance on the regional transport strategy element of RPG will be set out in a draft Planning Policy Guidance Note 11.

It is for RPCs, in consultation with other stakeholders and Government offices, to decide the timetable for updating RPG. All regions, except London and the West Midlands, are currently reviewing RPG. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, my Department will be providing significant additional funding to support the research efforts of the Government offices and the RPCs in developing RPG and we will also be meeting the administrative costs of the RPG public examinations.

The programme of studies proposed in Annex D of A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England will assist RPCs in addressing the most serious and urgent regional transport problems in either the current round or future updates of RPG. The studies will be led by Government offices in partnership with RPCs and funded by the Department at a cost of some £30 million over the next three years. We will shortly be consulting RPCs about our proposals. The first studies will begin in 1999–2000.

Traffic Forecasts

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the impact of the transport policy measures announced as part of A New Deal for Transport, on *(a)* forecasts of future traffic made in the 1997 National Road Traffic Forecasts and *(b)* future levels of congestion on the motorway and trunk road network as shown in the Highways Agency's stress maps. [58699]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Revising and updating the 1997 National Road Traffic Forecasts to reflect the impact of the New Deal for Transport will involve new approaches to forecasting traffic and its environmental and economic effects. The Department is currently developing plans to take this work forward, on which we will be seeking advice from the Commission for Integrated Transport, after it is established next year. Our revised forecasts will also need to take account of the non-statutory 'interim' road traffic reduction reports we expect to receive from local highway authorities in July next year as part of their provisional local transport plans.

The Highways Agency's motorway and trunk road stress maps will be revised in line with the National Road Traffic Forecasts, which play a central role in their production.

French Lorry Drivers' Dispute

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if all outstanding claims arising out of the French lorry drivers' dispute have been settled. [58990]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We understand that at 10 September some 200 claims from UK companies were still under consideration by the French authorities.

PRIME MINISTER

Countryside Responsibilities

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government have completed their review of countryside responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [57230]

The Prime Minister: The Government completed their Comprehensive Spending Review of countryside and rural policy earlier this year. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *246–47*.

The Government's new strategic approach—based upon a belief in the importance of integrating policies for rural areas, and ensuring that the rural dimension is fully reflected in wider policy-making—will enhance opportunity in rural areas, improve access to and enjoyment of the countryside and conserve and manage wildlife resources there. At Departmental level, work is in hand to improve co-ordination and financial planning of DETR and MAFF development programmes for rural areas. We have announced that from 1 April 1999 the work of the Rural Development Commission and the Countryside Commission will be brought together in a new agency to champion rural England. Regional Development Agencies will also have a specific remit to serve the rural areas of their regions, and will be responsible for developing an integrated approach to economic development and regeneration throughout their regions.

The Government believe in a living, working and sustainable countryside recognising the important links between rural and urban policy.

Ministerial Hospitality

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) of 9 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *17*, if he will give a definition of the term ministerial hospitality. [58730]

The Prime Minister: Ministerial hospitality covers expenditure on official entertainment hosted by Ministers including events organised by the Government Hospitality Fund. Hospitality is offered, and costed, on the same basis as it was by the last Administration.

Life Peers

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what criteria he employs in selecting candidates to be proposed for appointment as life peers. [58683]

The Prime Minister: That the individual concerned should be able to make a significant contribution to the work of the House of Lords.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *502–03*, concerning advice from the security forces, if he will set out the circumstances in which it is

deemed relevant that advice is made available to him; who is responsible for deeming it relevant; and if he will make a statement. [59004]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *402*.

"Supporting Families"

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he authorised inclusion of the Labour Party Manifesto 1997 in the list of related Government publications in the consultation paper "Supporting Families"; [59003]

(2) if the Government supplied copies of the first document in the reading list at the end of the "Supporting Families" consultation document to the Vote Office for distribution with the other publications listed. [59002]

The Prime Minister: The Labour Party Manifesto should have been included separately in the bibliography rather than under "Related Government Publications". No copies have been supplied to the Vote Office, but Members may obtain copies from Labour Party Headquarters.

Social Exclusion Unit

Ms Stuart: To ask the Prime Minister if he will instruct the Social Exclusion Unit to send copies of consultation letters issued by the client to individual hon. Members. [58804]

The Prime Minister: The Social Exclusion Unit is currently consulting on the subject of Teenage Parenthood. A consultation letter was issued on 7 October, and a copy has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and on the Unit's website, as will all future consultations.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if she will provide a breakdown in numerical and percentage terms of the ethnic origin of civil servants in her private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56763]

(2) if she will provide a breakdown in numerical and percentage terms of the ethnic origin of civil servants in her Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56761]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

Hill Farmers

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the income for hill farmers in Northern Ireland as *(a)* a total and *(b)* an average per farmer in 1997–98; and what are the predictions for income in the present financial year. [58013]

Mr. Paul Murphy: A total income figure for hill farmers in Northern Ireland is not available.

Estimates of the average income per farmer in 1997–98 and the prediction for 1998–99 will be published by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland on 30 November 1998, with accompanying statistical tables placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures the Government are *(a)* taking, and *(b)* proposing to take, to support the income levels of hill farmers in Northern Ireland. [58016]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Hill farmers in Northern Ireland continue to receive Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances (HLCAs). Payments are based on numbers of cattle and sheep held and an annual review is ongoing on a UK basis as part of the process of determining the payment rates for the 1999 scheme.

Under EU Agenda 2000 proposals such support will switch to payment based on areas rather than headage but will continue to be targeted at the LFA. Agenda 2000 negotiations are still at relatively early stages.

Act of Union (Bicentenary)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Government have to celebrate the bicentenary of the Act of Union between Ireland and Great Britain. [58071]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government have no plans to do so. Local communities and non-governmental organisations may wish to organise their own celebrations.

Proscribed Organisations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals have been *(a)* charged, *(b)* summarily convicted and *(c)* convicted on indictment under section 2 or the equivalent section of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 relating to membership of a proscribed organisation in each year since enactment; what percentage of those convicted in each year received a prison sentence; and what percentage of those were sentenced to a term of less than one year. [56320]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The following table illustrates the information as requested.

Persons:

Year	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Sentenced to imprisonment*	*Percentage where sentence less than one year*
1989	25	23	18	0
1990	33	30	24	0
1991	19	16	10	0
1992	16	15	10	0
1993	28	24	21	0
1994	19	17	17	0

	Persons:			
Year	Proceeded against	Found guilty	Sentenced to imprisonment	Percentage where sentence less than one year
1995	28	24	17	0
1996	7	6	6	0
1997	6	3	3	0

Notes:
1. Persons were sentenced for offences including membership of a proscribed organisation—not membership only—and hence the length of sentence in each case was more than one year.
2. The figures may include suspended sentences.
3. Persons have been charged with membership of a proscribed organisation based on evidence to substantiate that charge, e.g. a more serious charge of murder.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56813]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56811]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Israeli Government over the legality of their announcement of the addition of further Jewish housing units to the settlement of Kiryat Arba near Hebron. [58570]

Mr. Fatchett: We have made no formal representation to the Israeli government specifically about the announcement of the addition of further housing units to the settlement of Kiryat Arba near Hebron. But our position on settlements is clear and well known to them. Settlements in the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. We note the clarification given by Prime Minister Netanyahu's Office on 1 November that no new building permits have been issued in Jerusalem. We expect the Israeli government to continue to refrain from granting such permits, and to abide by the new spirit of co-operation forged at Wye.

East Timor

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of recent reports concerning changes in the number of Indonesian troops in East Timor. [58434]

Mr. Fatchett: We are concerned at reports of an increase in the number of Indonesian troops in East Timor. I raised our concerns at troop levels with President Habibie and Foreign Minister Alatas in Jakarta last month. We endorse the UN Secretary-General's recent call for a substantial reduction in the Indonesian military presence in the territory.

Mercenaries

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will sign the United Nations International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. [58423]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have no plans at present to sign the 1989 UN Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries because of widespread doubt that it is legally enforceable. The Convention has not attracted sufficient support to enter into force.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy relating to the use of mercenaries in armed conflicts. [58431]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We and our EU partners have always made it clear that we unequivocally condemn the recruitment, use and financing of mercenaries in armed conflict. We are concerned about the spread of mercenary activity.

EU Treaties (Translations)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official translations of *(a)* the four principal treaties of the European Union and *(b)* the Regulations and Directives in force, were made available to the Governments of countries who were candidates to join the EU during the United Kingdom's presidency. [58678]

Ms Quin: The four principal treaties and all the Regulations and Directives in force are published in all 11 official languages of the European Union. During the UK Presidency the European Commission started the process of screening the candidates' legislation against the EU's acquis, using the language versions agreed between the Commission and the candidate concerned.

Abductions

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the special unit in his Department which deals with cases of alleged abduction covers British citizens with dual nationality; and how many such cases there are which the unit is currently aware of but which have not been concluded, broken down by country and gender. [59018]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Department's special unit covers British citizens with dual nationality taken hostage as well as those without. The unit is presently handling one such case. The male abductee, kidnapped in August 1998 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, holds both New Zealand and British nationality.

Angola

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures Her Majesty's

Government have taken to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1173 (1998) which imposed further sanctions on UNITA as from 1 July. [52366]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[pursuant to his reply, 23 July 1998, c. 689–91]:* Additional information has reached me since my answer of 23 July. The correct answer is as follows.

Resolution 1173 imposed a freeze on the funds and financial resources of UNITA, its officials and their immediate families; a ban on most official contacts in Angola with UNITA; a prohibition on the import of diamonds outside the governmental certificate of origin regime; and prohibitions on the sale or supply of equipment which may be used in mining or transportation, and on transportation services.

We have instructed all our diplomatic missions overseas to avoid any contact with UNITA, whether locally or in Angola. There is one exception: our Embassy in Luanda may continue to have contacts with UNITA officials in areas of Angola to which State Administration has been extended. This is in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1173 (1998) which prohibits certain official contacts with UNITA.

The prohibition on the importation of diamonds will be given effect in the United Kingdom by amendment to the Open General Import Licence.

The remainder of the prohibitions are to be implemented in the UK by the Angola (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1998 and in the Overseas Territories by the Angola (United Nations Sanctions) (Dependent Territories) Order 1998 made on 21 July and laid in July.

Similar Orders have been made to give effect to the Resolution in the Crown Dependencies. These orders restrict the sale or supply of certain goods which may be used in mining or transportation and the supply of transportation services; impose a freeze on the funds and financial resources in relation to UNITA and persons connected with UNITA; and for the Overseas Territories and Channel Islands, restrict the importation of diamonds exported from Angola on or after 1 July 1998. There is provision for medical and humanitarian exceptions.

EU Business (Scrutiny)

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the projected date of release of the White Paper on National Scrutiny of European Union Business. [58009]

Mrs. Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

I expect the White Paper will be published shortly.

SCOTLAND

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to reduce the administrative burden on staff in further education colleges of processing information requested by *(a)* the Scottish Office, *(b)* training agencies and *(c)* local enterprise companies. [56951]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* In line with recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in its Second Report, the Government take care to ensure that necessary monitoring and collection of information are undertaken in a way that is as simple as possible and which does not create unnecessary bureaucracy. However, as further education colleges themselves recognise, the fair and equitable application of the funding methodology for colleges is dependent on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of information which the Department receives from colleges on student activity. It is also appropriate that colleges' use of Government funding should be subject to proper monitoring and audit.

Scottish Enterprise (SE) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) have responsibility for the management and delivery of Government funded training programmes. Administrative arrangements and information requirements are operational matters for these agencies. I understand that, following their recent Skillseekers Evaluation, SE and HIE are presently reviewing administrative procedures, with a view to simplifying them.

Pensioners (Reduced Taxi Fares)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will extend the travel discounts afforded to pensioners to allow for reduced fares on taxis. [57607]

Mr. Macdonald: Local authorities are able at present to provide pensioners with concessionary travel by taxi if they so wish. Local authorities have discretionary powers under section 93 of the Transport Act 1985 which allow any local authority, or any 2 or more local authorities acting jointly, to establish a concessionary travel scheme for eligible categories of person including pensioners. At present all Scottish local authorities, except Orkney Islands Council, operate concessionary travel schemes and a number include taxicards for pensioners.

Autism

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce a charter for persons with autism in line with the charter adopted at the fourth Autism Europe Congress in May 1992; and if he will make a statement. [57614]

Mr. Dewar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *558*.

Land Law Reform

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the terms of reference of the Scottish Law Commission's investigation of the reform of Scottish land law. [57760]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Law Commission's work on the reform of Scottish land law is part of its Fifth Programme of Law Reform submitted to the Lord Advocate on 7 February and published on 25 February 1997 published (Scot Law Com. No. 159). As stated in the programme under item No. 6 the Commission aims to make

recommendations for the abolition of the system of feudal tenure and its replacement with a modern system based on the principle of absolute ownership of land.

Organic Farming

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the disparity in support for organic farming as between *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England; and what factors underlie such a disparity. [57342]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* There is no disparity. The Government are committed to supporting increased organic production. Support for organic farming conditions in Scotland takes account of the specific challenges facing producers. Interim measures to enhance the Organic Aid Scheme are being considered before the scheme is merged as from Spring 2000 with the mainstream agri-environment schemes with the aim of giving organic farming in Scotland a higher profile.

Nursing Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have been assessed as being in need of long-term nursing care and are currently awaiting a placement *(a)* in total and *(b)* by local authority area. [58365]

Mr. Galbraith: Information on the number of patients awaiting a placement is not collected routinely. However, as at August 1998 Health Boards reported 1,716 patients in Scotland awaiting transfer from hospital to alternative continuing care. The information is not available by local authority care.

However, different Boards use different criteria for a "blocked bed" and the figures need to be interpreted with caution.

Not all the patients are assessed as requiring continuing nursing care. Those that are will have that care provided by an NHS Trust or by a registered nursing home under contract to the NHS.

Others, depending on assessed needs, will transfer to nursing home, residential home or domiciliary care under the lead responsibility of the local authority.

In every case, transfers to alternative care will be arranged only when the alternative planned care, support and accommodation are in place, appropriate and available.

Every effort is made to minimise delays in this process.

Trunk Road Review

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish the results of the Trunk Road Review for Scotland. [58703]

Mr. Macdonald: The consultation period on the Government's proposed framework for the appraisal of trunk road investment in Scotland ended on 16 October. The responses are now being analysed to enable the review to proceed and I expect the results to be available early next year.

Opencast Coal Developments

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish a revised version of planning document NPPG4: Land for Mineral Working. [58708]

Mr. Macdonald: Draft revised guidance on the new planning policy for opencast coal and related minerals working in Scotland was announced to the House on 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *1165–66*. The guidance sets out the most robust framework yet within which planning authorities must consider all proposals for opencast coal developments. Consultation on the guidance continues until 11 December with the intention of final guidance being in place early in the New Year. The guidance replaces paragraphs 74–78 of NPPG 4 on coal. As with all planning guidance the remainder of NPPG 4 is kept under review although there are no plans at present to update the non-coal aspects of the guidance.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan can expect a reply to his letter of 20 August to the Minister with responsibility for agriculture, regarding Mr. Will, a constituent. [58829]

Mr. Dewar: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Sewel, hopes to be able to reply to the letter shortly.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Secure Training Units

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the courts which have sentenced a young person to a period of detention in a secure training unit since April. [58466]

Mr. Boateng: As of 6 November, there have been 85 secure training orders made since the sentence came into effect on 1 March. The following Youth Courts have made one or more orders:

North East	*North West*	*South East*	*South West and Wales*	*Midlands*
Bishop Auckland	Barnsley	Arundel	Bath	Bedford
Bridlington	Bolton	Aylesbury	Cheltenham	Newcastle-under-Lyme
Darlington	Bradford	B[illegible]n	Fareham	Peterborough
Gosforth	Calderdale	Camberwell G[illegible]	Newport	South Worcester
Hartlepool	Dewsbury	Essex	Southampton	Wolverhampton
Humberside	Leigh	Folkestone	Swansea	—
Leeds	Liverpool	Great Yarmouth	Swindon	—
Northallerton	Macclesfield	Hammersmith	Wrexham	—
North East	Manchester	Ipswich	—	—

North East	*North West*	*South East*	*South West and Wales*	*Midlands*
Nottingham	Teesside	Kings Lynn	—	—
Scarborough	Trafford	Maidstone	—	—
Sheffield	—	Slough	—	—
Sunderland	—	Thames	—	—
—	—	Thanet	—	—
—	—	Tunbridge Wells	—	—
—	—	Waltham Forest	—	—
—	—	West Kent	—	—
—	—	Whitham	—	—

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many young persons have been sentenced to a period of detention in a secure training unit since April; and if he will make a statement; [58463]

(2) how many persons had been sentenced to a period of detention in a secure training unit but were waiting for a place at the latest available date. [58464]

Mr. Boateng: As of 6 November, 85 young people had been sentenced to a secure training order. There are currently 7 trainees in local authority secure accommodation for whom no places are available for them at present.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the range of offences committed by young persons sentenced to a period of detention in a secure training unit since April. [58465]

Mr. Boateng: The following range of offences have been committed by young people sentenced to a secure training order:

Affray
Arson
Aggravated vehicle taking
Attempted theft of motor vehicle
Burglary
Causing unnecessary suffering to an animal
Common assault
Criminal damage
Dangerous driving
Driving while disqualified
Indecent assault
No driving licence
Obtaining property by deception
Possession of a knife
Possession of drugs
Taking without the owner's consent
Theft
Violent disorder.

Health Care Staff

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about pay differentials between health care staff in the Prison Service and the National Health Service. [58460]

Mr. George Howarth: Nurses employed by the Prison Service are paid at the same basic rates and on the same terms and conditions as applied in the National Health Service. Many prison healthcare centres are also staffed by healthcare officers. These are paid on the appropriate prison officer scale and, in addition, receive a specialist allowance of £1,041 per annum. The prison officers' pay scale ranges between £14,863 and £21,257. Direct pay comparisons between healthcare officers and nurses are not appropriate as different employment conditions apply.

The Prison Service also employs doctors. From 1 January 1999 rates from Prison Service medical officers will range between £40,250 and £55,367. Rates for senior medical officers will range between £42,665 and £64,323. Individual salaries within these pay ranges will reflect qualifications, experience and performance. Rates for consultants in the National Health Service range between £45,740 and £59,040. In addition, discretionary points ranging between £2,370 and £11,810 can apply.

Child Curfews

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local authorities have applied to introduce a local child curfew; and if he will make a statement. [58457]

Mr. Boateng: Local child curfews are a new provision which will help a local authority develop its community safety strategy. The aim of such curfews is twofold. They will address the need to prevent young children from being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, and they will protect communities from the misery and distress which can be caused by groups of unsupervised children.

The power of local authorities to make a local child curfew scheme is an enabling one. It only came into force on 30 September 1998. Not surprisingly, therefore, no applications for local child curfew schemes have been received so far.

Policing

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposal to introduce targeted policing in 20 specific areas; what arrangements will be made for maintaining policing levels in other areas; and if he will make a statement. [58462]

Mr. Boateng: Research shows the value of targeted policing in addressing both complex community-wide problems, and specific repeated problems. Targeting policing effort at identified problems as part of a strategy to reduce crime and disorder enables chief officers to decide how to deploy their resources most effectively. The strategy should be based on an analysis of local crime and associated problems and the policing tactics adopted in the light of the analysis. The crime and disorder audits required by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 support this approach.

Equally, our approach is output-driven and we will expect careful evaluation to demonstrate how crime and disorder are effected as a result of any strategy and how that fits with the locally agreed targets for crime reduction.

To help forces develop this approach, we are making over £30 million available over the next three years for targeted policing projects as part of the crime reduction strategy.

This funding is in addition to the extra £1.24 billion which will be available to police authorities in England and Wales over the next three years under the Government's spending plans announced in the summer. This settlement, along with savings from the 2 per cent. year on year efficiency improvements which police forces will be asked to achieve, will help to ensure that more resources are focused on the front line against crime.

As experience around the country shows that targeted policing does not require additional police officers or other resources to be successful, there is no reason to believe that the work we are undertaking will adversely affect existing policing levels.

Prisoners

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of recorded criminal offences committed by people serving prison sentences in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [58456]

Mr. George Howarth: The available information for persons who have been charged with a further offence whilst on temporary release from prison is given in table 1.

Information relating to offences committed whilst in prison which are too serious for a prison governor to deal with under the prison disciplinary system and are referred to the police for prosecution is given in table 2. This information is also published in successive volumes of "Statistics of offences against prison discipline and punishments England and Wales" up to 1996, and thereafter in "Prison statistics England and Wales" (chapter 8 of the 1997 edition, Cm 4017). Copies are available in the Library.

Table 1
Prisoners charged with a further offence whilst on temporary release from prison, 1 September 1995 to 31 December 1997

Year	Number
September to December 1995	6
1996	9
1997	9

Table 2
Estimated number of offences referred to the police for prosecution by prison governors

Year	Number
1992	250
1993	[1]
1994	300 to 350
1995	450 to 500
1996	1,650
1997	1,540

[1] not applicable

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage and number of prisoners, at the latest available date, had previously served a non-custodial sentence; and if he will make a statement. [58455]

Mr. Boateng: The most recent available information relates to a sample of sentenced prisoners held in prison on 30 June 1997. The estimated percentage of sentenced prisoners identified as having previous non-custodial sentences is 74 per cent., corresponding to around 36,000 prisoners.

Previous criminal history information is, however, derived from matching Prison Service records to offender details of the Home Office Offenders Index and a further 9 per cent. of prisoners could not be matched. A prisoner may not be matched because he or she may have been sentenced for an offence not on the 'standard list' and has no previous record for standard list offences or alternatively there may be an inconsistency between personal details held on the Offenders Index and those held on prison records.

The percentage of prisoners identified as having no previous non-custodial sentences is 16 per cent. A slightly lower percentage (14 per cent.) of prisoners was identified as having no previous sentence of any kind (i.e. including custodial sentences).

Prison population[1] in Prison Service establishments under sentence on 30 June 1997: by past criminal history[2] England and Wales

	Percentage[3]
Population	48,674
Previous history not found[4]	9
Previous[2] non-custodial sentence	74
No previous[2] non-custodial sentence	16
No previous[2] sentence of any kind	14

[1] Excludes fine defaulters and is based on a sample of 13,832 prisoners.

[2] Relates to convictions for 'standard list' offences only. These offences include all indictable offences and some of the more serious summary offences.

[3] Percentages for previous history not found, previous non-custodial sentence and no previous non-custodial sentence do not add to 100 due to rounding.

[4] Information on prisoners was matched to records on the Home Office Offenders Index. In some cases no set of matching records can be found.

Health Care Services (Young Offenders)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to create a new position for the overseeing of the health care services for young offenders in custody; and if he will make a statement. [58461]

Mr. George Howarth: Health care in young offender institutions, in common with other Prison Service establishments, is delivered through the local operational line and supported by Prison Service area health care and nursing advisers. The Prison Service has no plans to create a new position specifically to oversee health care for young offenders. However, the future organisation of prison health care is currently under review.

Medway Secure Training Centre

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the contract points requirements have been exceeded at the Medway secure training centre; and if fines *(a)* have been levied and *(b)* are being considered. [58471]

Mr. Boateng: The contract for Medway Secure Training centre provides for an evaluation of performance each quarter against a standard which assumes year on year improvement. At the end of the first quarter, contract payments were reduced by £5,869 to reflect performance points accumulated in that period. The evaluation of the second quarter has not yet taken place.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* assaults on staff and inmates and *(b)* acts of indiscipline there have been by young persons at the Medway secure training centre since its opening. [58468]

Mr. Boateng: Since Medway Secure Training Centre opened, the contractor has recorded a total of 97 assaults on staff by trainees. Twenty-six of these assaults resulted in staff being referred for medical treatment, and in 11 cases they led to criminal charges. Fourteen assaults on trainees by other trainees have been recorded, and in one case this led to criminal charges.

Fourteen incidents of concerted indiscipline involving more than two trainees have been recorded. In three cases, this led to criminal charges.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people have absconded from the Medway secure training centre since its opening. [58467]

Mr. Boateng: Two trainees breached the perimeter security at Medway Secure Training Centre on 22 August. They were immediately pursued by members of staff and were quickly returned to the centre.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total staff complement at the Medway secure training centre. [58470]

Mr. Boateng: The agreed staff complement for Medway Secure Training Centre is 100.5 staff.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have resigned or been dismissed from the Medway secure training centre since it opened. [58469]

Mr. Boateng: Since Medway Secure Training Centre opened, 35 staff have resigned. The contract of one member of staff was terminated by mutual agreement, and one member of staff employed by a sub-contractor was dismissed.

Ex-service Men (Prisoners)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the average number of ex-servicemen and servicewomen serving prison sentences during the past year; and if he will make a statement. [58472]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is not available. Information regarding an individual's professional status, prior to reception into a Prison Service establishment, is not recorded on central computer records.

Young People (Re-offending)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if figures are available for the re-offending rates of young people released from each young offender institution; and if he will make a statement. [58458]

Mr. Boateng: The most recent available information is given in the table. It relates to a sample of sentenced prisoners released during 1994. The table contains reconviction rates within two years of discharge for young offenders discharged from each institution.

Differences between reconviction rates cannot simply be taken to show that one establishment is more effective than another as the characteristics of offenders vary between establishments.

The sample was drawn to produce national results. Reconviction rates at individual establishments need to be interpreted with considerable caution due to small numbers in the sample at some establishments.

Reconviction rates are affected by differences in age, sex, previous convictions and other characteristics of those sentenced (see Home Office Research Study 136, "Explaining reconviction rates: a critical analysis").

It is important to note that:

The establishment from which a prisoner is discharged will often not be the establishment in which he or she spent most of their sentence;

The process of allocation of prisoners to establishments is far from random. In some instances, prisoners are virtually hand-picked as being suitable for a particular type of regime. Factors such as age, gender and previous criminal history have significant influence on the allocation process; and

regional variations in reconviction rates are likely to be related to factors such as police clear-up rates and this, in turn, will have some effect on rates for individual establishments.

Reconviction rates within two years[1] for prisoners discharged from young offender institutions during 1994

Establishment	*Number sampled*[2]	*Reconviction rate*
Aylesbury	50	66
Brinsford	230	87
Castington	128	73
Deerbolt	593	85
Dover	290	65
Drake Hall	79	54
Feltham	525	68
Glen Parva	410	74
Guys Marsh	278	81
Hatfield	293	66
Hollesley Bay	166	60
Huntercombe/Finnamore Wood	357	64
Lancaster Farms	81	79
Moorland	82	74
Onley	674	78
Portland	380	80
Stoke Heath	219	80
Thorn Cross	417	75

Reconviction rates within two years[1] for prisoners discharged from young offender institutions during 1994

Establishment	Number sampled[2]	Reconviction rate
USK/Prescoed	58	60
Warrington	291	87
Wetherby	374	86
Total	6,135	75

[1] For standard list offences only. These include all indictable offences and some of the more serious summary offences.
[2] Figures are not given where the sample contains fewer than 50 offenders discharged from an institution.

Conviction Rates

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the *(a)* conviction rate and *(b)* clear up rate (i) for each category of crime and (ii) on average (1) at the last available date and (2) in each of the previous two years; and if he will make a statement. [58459]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is given in the tables. Figures for clear-ups and convictions are not directly comparable because clear-ups relate to offences and convictions relate to offenders.

Table A: Conviction rate[1] for indictable offences by offence group, England and Wales, 1995–1997[2]

Offence Group	1995	1996	1997[2]
Violence against the person	48	47	49
Sexual offences	64	68	64
Burglary	67	64	64
Robbery	52	52	52
Theft and handling stolen goods	73	73	74
Fraud and forgery	70	70	70
Criminal damage	59	58	60
Drug offences	83	84	84
Other (excluding motoring)	54	53	54
Motoring offences	74	74	77
Total indictable offences	65	65	66

[1] Offenders found guilty at all courts as a percentage of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts.
[2] Provisional

Table B: Clear-up rate for notifiable offences by offence group

	England and Wales Percentage offences cleared up[1]		
Offence Group	1995	1996	1997
Violence against the person	77	77	78
Sexual offences	76	76	76
Burglary	21	21	23
Robbery	23	26	27
Theft and handling stolen goods	23	23	24
Fraud and forgery	50	49	48
Criminal damage[2]	19	17	19
Other offences[3]	96	96	95
Total	26	26	28

[1] Offences cleared-up in one year may have been initially recorded in an earlier year.
[2] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[3] Includes trafficking in controlled drugs.

Immigration

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have received permission to enter or remain in the UK under the concession introduced in October 1997 for people in relationships. [58339]

Kate Hoey: In the 12 months ending September 1998, a provisional total of 383 people have been granted leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom under the concession for unmarried partners announced on 10 October 1997.

Religious Cults

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to legislate to control religious cults; [58440]

(2) if he will set up an inquiry into religious cults with a view to creating an acceptable framework for their operations. [58441]

Mr. George Howarth: We have no plans to do so. The Government understand concerns expressed about the influence of some groups on individuals, but do not consider that it would be feasible or appropriate to introduce specific legislation or regulation. All such groups are subject to the general law, including harassment, obtaining property or money by deception, kidnap, false imprisonment, offences against the person and sexual assault. Any complaints about breaches of the law should be reported to the police.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received in the past year from hon. Members on behalf of constituents with family members who belong to religious cults. [58439]

Mr. George Howarth: Since 1 November 1997, we have received 17 such representations from hon. Members, including 12 on behalf of one constituent.

Independent Commission on the Voting System

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the members of the Independent Commission on the Voting System spent on foreign travel. [58350]

Mr. George Howarth: The total cost of the Independent Commission's foreign trips was as follows:

	£
Australia	10,009
Germany	4,175
New Zealand	8,782
Republic of Ireland	2,558

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what class the members of the Independent Commission on the Voting System travelled abroad by air on Commission business. [58352]

Mr. George Howarth: The members of the Independent Commission travelled in business class.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost to date of the Independent Commission on the Voting System to the British Exchequer. [58351]

Mr. George Howarth: The final costs of the Independent Commission are still being calculated but we estimate that the total cost will be in the region of £250,000.

General Pinochet

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to the British Exchequer of General Pinochet's police protection *(a)* since his arrival in the United Kingdom to date and *(b)* since the warrant for his arrest was issued to date. [58347]

Mr. Straw: The arrangements for the provision of protection are operational matters for the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

For security reasons, it has been the practice of successive Governments not to provide information about police operations relating to protection.

Police Cadets

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police cadets there were in *(a)* May 1979 and *(b)* May 1997; how many there are at present; what plans he has to increase the number; and if he will make a statement. [58540]

Mr. Boateng: The information is set out in the table.

Year	*Number of police cadets*
May 1979	2,893
March 1997[1]	261
March 1998[1]	127

[1] After March 1995 police personnel numbers were collected only twice a year (March and September). September 1998 figures are not yet available.

In 1979, all forces had police cadets. By 1997, cadets were employed in only six forces, and by March 1998 in four forces (Bedfordshire, Durham, Staffordshire and West Midlands).

Ministers have no direct control over numbers of police personnel. It has always been a matter for chief constables and police authorities to determine whether to employ police cadets.

Internet Publishing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to require all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by his Department to publish their working papers and minutes on the Internet. [58770]

Mr. Straw: Task forces and other equivalent bodies that are sponsored by my Department, even when independent from it, are encouraged to publish their reports and other documents through the Home Office's internet web site. The Youth Justice Task Force and the Community Fire Safety Task Force have already done so and arrangements are being made for others to do so.

Lorry Stowaways

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has carried out with other EU members concerning individuals seeking to make a clandestine illegal entry into the United Kingdom in lorries. [58514]

Kate Hoey: In order to combat the problem of clandestine entry, the United Kingdom has taken forward several initiatives which have involved consultation with our European partners. These include:

- closer liaison and exchanges of information and intelligence with the Belgian, Dutch and French authorities;
- the placement of an Immigration Liaison Officer in Calais for a three month trial period which started in September, following an agreement reached by my right hon. Friend and his French counterpart;
- on-going negotiations with French authorities, including DICCILEC, to tackle the problem—the last meeting took place in Paris at the end of October;
- frequent discussion of such issues at various European fora, such as the Justice and Home Affairs Council, which last met in September;
- regular discussions with the port authorities in France, Belgium and Holland in order to target illegal entrants in lorries before they reach the United Kingdom.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines have been given to the police for dealing with clandestine illegal entrants arriving in lorries. [58516]

Mr. Boateng: There are currently no formal guidelines to the police for dealing with clandestine illegal entrants arriving in lorries. As I said in my reply to the hon. Member on 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *183*, the Immigration Service is consulting the police forces most affected by the arrival of clandestine entrants to ensure that incidents are dealt with properly. In areas where it is necessary, we hope to have a standard agreement in place shortly between the police and the Immigration Service to provide a clear mechanism for dealing with clandestine entrants.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the number of cases of clandestine illegal entry to the United Kingdom in lorries involving *(a)* Kosovans, *(b)* Albanians and *(c)* others in the most recent period for which figures are available; [58512]

(2) how many clandestine illegal entrants have presented themselves at Lunar House, Croydon and *(a)* claimed asylum and *(b)* not claimed asylum in the most recent period for which figures are available. [58513]

Kate Hoey: There is no estimate of the total number of persons gaining clandestine illegal entry to the United Kingdom, by lorry or otherwise, since, by the very nature of the problem, it is not possible to establish that a person has entered clandestinely until they have been traced and interviewed. Regrettably, therefore, the information requested is not available.

There is no central record of the total numbers of persons presenting themselves as clandestine illegal entrants at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate public caller facilities at Lunar House in Croydon and such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The available information relates to the total number of persons issued with notices of illegal entry as clandestine entrants, which between 1 January 1998 and 30 June 1998

totalled 3,540 persons. Information on the numbers of these persons who are, or who claim to be, Kosovan, and the particular methods of clandestine entry, is not held centrally. However, 550 were identified as nationals of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; 290 were nationals of Albania; and 190 persons' nationalities could not be determined. Within the total of 3,540 persons, almost 90 per cent. have applied for asylum in the United Kingdom at some stage. These figures are provisional and rounded.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has carried out with representatives of *(a)* road haulage firms and *(b)* lorry drivers concerning clandestine illegal entrants arriving in the United Kingdom in lorries. [58515]

Kate Hoey: My right hon. Friend wrote to the Road Haulage Association in July this year, offering to meet it to discuss the issue of clandestine illegal immigration. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), and Home Office officials met representatives of the Road Hauliers Association, the Freight Transport Association and the freight companies Cavewood Ltd. and Rockold European Transport on behalf of my right hon. Friend on 28 October. We are committed to consulting with representatives of the road haulage industry as we seek to identify a solution to this problem.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given to port authorities concerning clandestine illegal entrants arriving in the United Kingdom in lorries. [58517]

Kate Hoey: Discussions have taken place with port authorities outside the United Kingdom with the aim of preventing illegal entrants from reaching the United Kingdom. Arrangements are in place to ensure that port authorities in the United Kingdom are aware that if they encounter suspected immigration offenders within the port they should bring them to the attention of the Immigration Service.

Children (Sex Abuse)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the Indecency with Children Act 1960 to protect those between the ages of 14 and 16 years. [58310]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are concerned to ensure that children are protected from all kinds of sexual abuse. The law provides protection against sexual abuse of all kind. The Indecency with Children Act 1960 relates to gross indecency with or towards a child under the age of 14, or inciting a child to commit such an act; the maximum penalty for this offence has recently been increased to ten years.

We recognise that the law on sexual offences contains many anomalies, and the differing ages at which children are protected from various kinds of unacceptable behaviour is one such anomaly. That is why we have said that we will be conducting a review of sex offences to consider all such offences, and this will be one issue we will consider. One of the principal aims of the review will be to ensure that the legal framework, as far as possible, protects children and deals effectively with those who use and abuse them.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the issues of *(a)* valid legal consent and *(b)* informed consent as they relate to children subjected to sexual abuse. [58312]

Mr. Boateng: We are committed to undertaking a wide-ranging review of the sexual offences and penalties, with a view to reforming them and bringing them up to date. However, the Government will not consider reducing the age of consent below 16—indeed, one of the principal aims of the review will be to ensure that the legal framework, as far as possible, protects children and deals effectively with those who use and abuse them.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the provisions of the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996 to the same offences being planned against young people in the UK. [58313]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no plans to extend the provisions of the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996 to the same offences being planned against young people in the United Kingdom because these provisions already exist in the criminal law. Anyone in the United Kingdom planning to commit sexual offences against young people in this country may be liable for an offence such as conspiracy, as set out in section 1 of the Criminal Law Act 1977, or counselling or procuring an offence contrary to section 8 of the Accessories and Abettors Act 1861 or incitement to commit an offence contrary to common law.

The Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996 extended the existing jurisdiction of the courts over conspiracies and incitement to commit crimes in the United Kingdom to conspiracies and incitement to commit certain sexual acts abroad against children, provided that the substantive act constituted an offence both under the law in the United Kingdom and in the country in which the act was to be committed. The Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998 repealed the part of the 1996 Act dealing with conspiracy and extended the jurisdiction of the courts to include conspiracies to commit any crime abroad, provided that the substantive act constituted an offence both under the law in the United Kingdom and in the country in which the act was to be committed. The consent of the Attorney-General to proceedings under the 1998 Act will normally be required.

Prostitution (Under-16s)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of girls under 16 years cautioned in relation to offences connected with prostitution or charged with similar offences over the past five years who have a background in local authority care. [58311]

Mr. Boateng: Statistics held centrally do not identify children in local authority care from the total number of those cautioned or charged for prostitution offences.

The Government are determined to tackle the problem of children abused through prostitution and the measures we have announced in response to the Children's

Safeguards Review are intended to protect looked-after children from those who might seek to abuse them, including those who might seek to involve them in prostitution. In addition, the Home Office is working with the Department of Health to produce new comprehensive inter-agency guidance for the police and local authorities on the treatment of children abused through prostitution. That guidance will recognise that children abused through prostitution come from a variety of backgrounds, including local authority care, and offer guidance on how to deal with the problem.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average period of time taken for a sex offender's name to appear on the national register of sex offenders following a conviction for a sexual offence. [58529]

Mr. Boateng: The Sex Offenders Act 1997 requires offenders convicted of a relevant offence to notify the police of their name and address within 14 days of conviction or release from prison if a custodial sentence is passed. Although the information is held on the Police National Computer the original notification is made locally. The average time taken for registration could, therefore, be calculated only by reference to over 6,000 paper records held by police forces. Such an exercise would involve disproportionate cost.

Drug Traffickers

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to bring forward proposals for new powers to confiscate the assets of drug traffickers and other criminals. [59214]

Mr. Straw: I will publish tomorrow the Third Report of the Home Office Working Group on Confiscation. This will be available in the Vote Office and in the Library. The Report recommends measures to strengthen the legislation on confiscation and money laundering and its practical operation. It also proposes extending powers for the forfeiture of criminal assets in civil proceedings. In view of the innovatory nature of some of the Working Group's recommendations, it is important that the public should be able to comment on what is proposed. There will be a consultation period until the end of February.

Effective means of recovering criminal assets and depriving organised crime of its working capital are an essential tool of law enforcement. I attach great importance to ensuring that these powers are modernised. I am also determined that new powers should be subject to the right safeguards. The Government will take account of the responses to the Report before reaching decisions on its recommendations. In the meantime, I propose to initiate a separate study of the possibility, discussed in the Report, of establishing a confiscation or forfeiture agency.

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56792]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56790]

Mr. Straw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Millennium Experience

29. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the size of the total lottery contribution to the Millennium dome. [57272]

Mr. Mandelson: I have received many representations from members of the public and from Members of this House about all aspects of the Millennium Experience project. Of the £2 billion of lottery money which the Millennium Commission is distributing to flagship and community-based initiatives around the country, £449 million (gross) will go to the Millennium Experience project—this incorporates both the Dome at Greenwich and a linked programme of events and activities around the country.

30. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to include information on cancer research in Britain in the Millennium dome. [57273]

Mr. Mandelson: The zones within the Dome will explore different aspects of our lives. The zones which will include a look at the world of medicine are those dedicated to the Body and the Mind. In developing the detailed content of these zones, the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is taking advice from a number of advisers—including Sir Kenneth Calman (the recently retired Chief Medical Officer for England), and Professor Catherine Peckham and Sir Michael Peckham.

34. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the impact of the millennium experience on the regions. [57277]

Mr. Mandelson: One of the key commitments made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when the decision to proceed with the Millennium Experience was announced was that it would be a truly national event. I am delighted to say that this commitment is being more than met through the New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) national programme of events and activities and the Millennium Festival. Both initiatives are an integral part of the Millennium Experience project and their impact is already being felt in all regions of the United Kingdom.

The national programme consists of the Learning Experience and the UK Challenge which embrace a range of exciting projects. These include: Tesco SchoolNet 2000—enabling thousands of children across the UK to record their own ideas and those of their families about how they see life in the third Millennium; Marks and Spencer's Voices of Promise—a celebration of music talent in schools, encouraging young people to compose

songs and perform them locally: and Manpower's UK Skills Championships, which brings together a range of competitions covering specific skills and trades.

The Millennium Festival, which is being run by the NMEC, in partnership with the Lottery Distributors, is offering grants to local and regional projects covering arts, sport, heritage and charitable activities and events taking place during the year 2000. More than 3,500 applications have been received in the first grant round.

In addition, to those specific initiatives, the positive impact of the Millennium Experience on the tourism and leisure industries will undoubtedly benefit the UK as a whole. For example, the NMEC aims to ensure access to pre-employment training opportunities to people around the country in preparation for recruiting staff to operate the Millennium Experience at Greenwich during 2000.

35. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the contract for catering in the millennium experience has been awarded; if it was put out to tender; and if he will make a statement. [57278]

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce the outcome of bids for the provision of catering facilities at the Millennium Exhibition at Greenwich. [57210]

Mr. Mandelson: The new Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) policy is to provide as wide a range of catering services as possible to meet the varied needs of visitors to the Dome. The NMEC intends to divide the provision of catering services between branded suppliers and a single catering services company. On 9 October the NMEC issued invitations to tender to thirty catering companies covering both branded suppliers and others. The deadline for tenders to be submitted is 16 November and the NMEC expects to reach decisions about contract awards by the end of this year.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the New Millennium Experience Company has authority to receive sponsorship from anonymous corporate donors; [57017]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 2 September 1998, *Official Report*, column *866*, if he will ensure that the name of each company which concludes a sponsorship agreement with the New Millennium Experience is published immediately thereafter; and if he will make a statement. [57019]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 October 1998]:* There are no formal qualifications attaching to the New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) remit to raise sponsorship towards the cost of the Millennium Experience project in its Memorandum of Association, in the Financial Memorandum issued by the Shareholder in February 1997 or in the Grant Agreement issued by the Millennium Commission in August 1997.

The NMEC has not received any offers of sponsorship with anonymity of source as a condition; nor is it seeking such offers. Indeed, the whole basis on which the NMEC's sponsorship strategy is built concerns the benefits sponsors can achieve through public recognition of their support. The names of sponsors who have made a commitment to the project have been, and will continue to be, announced at such points in the negotiations between them and the NMEC which the two parties consider acceptable.

Pledge 2000

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Pledge 2000. [58320]

Mrs. Roche: Pledge 2000™ was launched by Action 2000 on 29 July 1998 in response to industry demand for an approach companies could use to deal with the Millennium Bug. It is a public scheme designed to indicate statement of intent to work co-operatively with customers and suppliers to disclose, discuss and solve issues of mutual interest arising from the date change problem. Although not legally binding, Pledge 2000™ reduces the fear of litigation and enables work to continue towards ensuring business continuity up and down the numerous supply chains that underpin the UK economy.

The pledge is in the form of a six point manifesto encouraging companies to share information, help other firms in their supply chains and avoid resorting to legal action wherever possible. Signing Pledge 2000™ represents a commitment at the highest level and is signed by a Board level person who is responsible for communicating the company's pledge internally. Action 2000 will continue to encourage businesses to use this valuable tool to resolve their Millennium Bug issues.

Consumer Durables (Prices)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the average change in prices of consumer durables as a result of last year's Government announcement of changes to resale price maintenance policies. [58984]

Dr. Howells: The RPI shows that retail prices of consumer durables have fallen by 4.4 per cent. in real terms in the year to September 1998. There has been no change in Government policy in relation to resale price maintenance. It is prohibited except where the Restrictive Practices Court has permitted an exemption.

Doorstep Selling

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received relating to unacceptable practices in doorstep selling; and if he will make a statement. [58138]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* My Department has received a number of representations from consumers about unacceptable practices in doorstep selling. The DTI recently consulted on proposals to strengthen consumer protection in this area. I hope to make Regulations by the end of the year to implement these proposals.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the steps available to an employee to seek redress against an employer who *(a)* refuses to implement the Working Time Directive and *(b)* seeks to avoid meeting the employee rights contained in the Working Time Directive. [57718]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 4 November 1998]:* An employee can seek redress against an employer for non-compliance with the Working Time Regulations

through two enforcement bodies. The limits (e.g. the weekly working time and night work limits) in the Regulations are enforced by the health and safety enforcing authorities e.g. the Health and Safety Executive and Local Authorities. The entitlements (e.g. the rest periods and breaks and the paid annual leave) are enforced through Employment Tribunals.

Astra Holdings

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *118*, what is the current estimated public cost of the disqualification proceedings against the directors of Astra Holdings. [57608]

Dr. Howells: Payments totalling £355,500 have been made to 5 of the 6 respondent directors in the disqualification proceedings. The only significant costs remaining outstanding are those of one legally aided respondent, Gerald James, whose solicitors have been paid £400,000 on account but the final figure has not yet been determined. In addition, the costs of the Treasury Solicitor acting for the Department are estimated at £280,000.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants for compensation arising out of vibration white finger have received full settlement in respect of their claims. [58735]

Mr. Battle: As of 5 November, 1,828 VWF claimants have received full settlements.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants for compensation arising from vibration white finger fall in the age groups *(a)* 40 to 50, *(b)* 50 to 60, *(c)* 60 to 70, *(d)* 70 to 80 and *(e)* 80 years and over. [58726]

Mr. Battle: To date the numbers of claims received for VWF, for the age groups specified, are:

(a) 4,557

(b) 7,638

(c) 8,296

(d) 4,902

(e) 496.

Respiratory Diseases

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants for compensation arising out of chronic bronchitis and emphysema fall into the age groups *(a)* 40 to 50, *(b)* 50 to 60, *(c)* 60 to 70, *(d)* 70 to 80 and *(e)* 80 years and over. [58736]

Mr. Battle: To date the numbers of claims received for chronic bronchitis and for emphysema, for the age groups specified, are:

(a) 2,303

(b) 6,667

(c) 13,759

(d) 17,228

(e) 5,762.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants for compensation arising out of chronic bronchitis and emphysema have received full settlement in respect of their claims. [58728]

Mr. Battle: Pending agreement on a medical assessment process, full and final settlements have so far been made only to the lead cases decided by the court. 7 such settlements have been paid. In addition the Department has made interim payments to 10,047 claimants.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects an agreement to be reached in respect of outstanding compensation claims relating to occupational respiratory disease; and how quickly medical reports could be produced following the conclusion of a handling agreement. [57575]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* My Department is fully committed to settling all valid occupational respiratory disease claims (COAD) as fairly and promptly as possible. To date this number in excess of 60,000. We have proposed to the plaintiff's solicitors that the claims should be dealt with through a single medical process which should expedite the processing of claims quite significantly compared with the conventional common law route where each party obtains their own medical report. Intense but constructive discussions are now taking place with the plaintiff's solicitors, on what are complex medical matters, within a framework agreed by the court. I hope that good progress will have been made towards resolving the outstanding issues by the end of the year. There will then be a need to procure through tendering the medical services required to deliver the records, reports and examinations required, and for the successful tenderer to put in place the staff and facilities to deliver the service. Subject to a prompt conclusion to negotiations with the plaintiff's solicitors I am hopeful that final settlement of valid claims will start flowing early in the second half of 1999. In the meantime we may be able to extend payment of interim awards.

Motor Vehicles (Prices)

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to monitor the comparative prices of motor vehicles in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the rest of the EU, *(c)* Japan and *(d)* the United States. [57939]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The Department of Trade and Industry monitors the European Commission's six-monthly reports on car prices across the EU. These comprehensive reports compare the prices in each Member State (including the United Kingdom) of the best-selling models in the EU.

The Department does not currently monitor the comparative prices of motor vehicles in either Japan or the United States.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will require industrial tribunals to maintain statistics on the size of employers involved in cases brought before them. [58137]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* There is no requirement on an employer to disclose this information routinely to an employment tribunal and hence the Employment Tribunals Service does not maintain such statistics. I have no plans to introduce such a requirement.

Single Currency

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact on the levels of inward investment of the UK's decision not to join the single currency; and what steps he has taken to advertise the benefits of that decision to potential inward investors. [58679]

Mrs. Roche: The level of inward investment in the UK is unlikely to be significantly affected in the short-term as a result of the Government's decision not to recommend UK membership of the single currency in the first-wave.

The UK attracts a significantly larger share of inward investment than other countries in the EU. This reflects a number of important benefits that we offer including low taxes, the English language, a flexible and adaptable work-force and a commitment to lasting economic stability.

In the short-term, while the UK remains insufficiently converged with the rest of Europe there would be risks for stability in the UK if we joined EMU, and hence for inward investment. However, looking further ahead if the single currency succeeds in promoting stability and strengthening the Single Market, there may be a risk that inward investment decisions at the margin would move against countries perceived to be staying out for the longer term.

The Invest in Britain Bureau continues to promote in all major international markets all the inherent strengths which have made, and will maintain, the United Kingdom as the most attractive European location for inward investment.

Start-up Grants

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies have received start-up grants and closed within two years of opening in the last five years. [58119]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* Over the past five years, there have been 957 offers of Regional Selective Assistance grant for start-up projects. Of these, 61 companies closed within two years of the offer being accepted.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by whom the decision not to recover start-up grant from Siemens at present was made; what the company has been told as regards possible future repayment of that grant; and if he will make the relevant correspondence available in the Library. [58117]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* My officials are currently working with the company trying to find a buyer for the plant. Whilst that is the case, I have decided that it would be inappropriate to recover the grant. However, the company has been informed that if any of the grant aided assets are removed without prior permission, or the plant finally has to close, it would be in breach of the conditions set down in the offer letter and the Department would have the power to seek full recovery, plus interest if appropriate, of the £18 million grant paid.

I will not be making the correspondence available in the Library. This is part of the official record and would add nothing to the answer above.

Non-fossil Fuel Levy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the non-fossil fuel levy is allocated to the support of *(a)* renewable energy and *(b)* nuclear power in the current financial year; and what plans he has to vary these arrangements in future. [57095]

Mr. Battle: The Fossil Fuel Levy Act which came into effect on 1 April 1998 ensured that electricity supplied from nuclear sources continued to be subject to the Fossil Fuel Levy. From 1 April all of the proceeds from the Fossil Fuel Levy have been used for the support of generation of electricity from renewable sources. I have no plans to use the levy for other purposes.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what communications Ministers or officials in his Department have had with *(a)* Euratom and *(b)* the International Atomic Energy Agency in respect of the proposals for the substitution of BNFL-owned plutonium for foreign-owned plutonium contained in wastes from the Sellafield Plutonium-Uranium mixed oxide fuel plant. [57105]

Mr. Battle: Ministers and officials in my Department have not had any communication with *(a)* Euratom or *(b)* International Atomic Energy Agency in respect of the proposals for the substitution of BNFL owned plutonium for foreign-owned plutonium contained in wastes from the Sellafield Mox Plant.

Aviation Fuel

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research into alternatives to Jet A1 aviation fuel is being funded by his Department. [55781]

Mr. Battle: None.

Motor Manufacturers (Crash Test Standards)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to mitigate the impact of the new EC crash test standards on the costs of UK-based motor manufacturers. [57789]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 4 November 1998]:* I have been asked to reply.

We welcome the introduction of the new European front and side impact standards which represent a valuable step forward in making cars which are subject to EC Whole Vehicle Type Approval safer. The standards have applied to new designs since 1 October this year, but will not apply to existing car designs until 1 October 2003. We believe the timescales in the Directive will allow vehicle manufacturers to incorporate modifications at the design

and development stage as models are changed or updated. As the new standards apply across the whole of Europe, the cost of designing to them must fall to industry.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Industrial Heritage

12. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his Department's support for Britain's industrial heritage. [57253]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Our industrial heritage is of unquestionable value in helping us to understand our history and the way our forefathers lived and worked. No industry has had a bigger influence on creating modern day Britain than coal. I was very pleased to be able to announce recently that my Department will pay an annual revenue subsidy grant to the National Coal Mining Museum for England from 1999–2000.

The NCMME has a fascinating story to tell and DCMS support will provide the stability to allow it to plan for an exciting future.

Arts Council

15. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the allocation of funding by the Arts Council for music. [57257]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Arts Council of England devotes a substantial part of its budget each year to supporting music. It will make a further contribution over the years ahead through its support of the Youth Music Trust.

World Heritage Sites

16. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many natural sites the Government are putting forward to UNESCO as proposed new world heritage sites. [57258]

Mr. Chris Smith: Together with Ministerial colleagues in the other interested Departments, I will need carefully to consider the results of the current consultation exercise before reaching a final decision on the number of natural sites to include in the list.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date he expects to announce the United Kingdom's list of world heritage sites for submission to UNESCO. [57517]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* Together with Ministerial colleagues in the other interested Departments, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will need carefully to consider the results of the current consultation exercise before reaching a final decision on the list; but we hope that an announcement can be made within the next two or three months.

News at Ten

17. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received on the proposal to reschedule News at Ten. [57259]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have received 2 letters from hon. Members on behalf of constituents and 19 letters from members of the public. Of these 21 letters, 19 were against the proposal to move News at Ten and 2 were in favour of allowing the move.

New Opportunities Fund

18. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the progress of the new opportunities fund. [57260]

Mr. Banks: The New Opportunities Fund will invite grant applications for its first three initiatives early next year and plans to announce the first awards next spring.

Scientific Centres

19. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to co-ordinate the work of scientific "hands-on" centres across the UK. [57261]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have no such plans. However, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) will shortly be publishing a consultation document, outlining, among other things, its proposals for a programme which aims to contribute to the UK public's knowledge and appreciation of science, technology and the arts. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, such "hands-on" centres may be able to bid for contracts being awarded by NESTA or enter into joint venture with them. This would obviously be a matter for the Chairman and Trustees of NESTA.

BBC Licence Fee

20. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Government intend to review the BBC licence fee; and what form the review will take. [57262]

Janet Anderson: We shall be reviewing the future of the BBC licence fee after 2002 early next year. The issues will be examined initially by an independent review panel which will report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State no later than the end of July. We shall then consult on the panel's findings.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he plans to include a pensioner representative in the membership of the independent review panel considering BBC funding after 2002; and if the panel will be required to consult pensioner organisations; [58492]

(2) if he expects to implement changes in the current concessionary television licence scheme before 2002; [58660]

(3) when he expects to announce the membership of the independent review panel considering BBC funding after 2002. [58493]

Janet Anderson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing the membership of the review panel shortly.

The review panel will no doubt wish to consider the views of various bodies and groups of people, including pensioners. In addition, pensioner groups will have an opportunity to feed in their views when the Government consult publicly on the panel's findings.

The Government will consider any proposals to change the concessionary television licence scheme, and the implementation of any changes, following the consultation exercise.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to reduce the TV licence fee for blind people; and if he will make a statement. [58279]

Janet Anderson: Current concessionary arrangements, including those for blind people, will be examined next year as part of the review of the future of the BBC licence fee after 2002. The issues will be examined initially by an independent review panel which will report to the Secretary of State by the end of July. The Government will then consult on the panel's findings.

Millennium Projects

21. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in what ways millennium projects will benefit people in the north-west. [57263]

Mr. Chris Smith: Millennium Commission capital projects in the North-West have been awarded grant totalling almost £115 million.

These projects are creating opportunities for employment, education, entertainment and tourism which will benefit individuals and communities across the whole of the North-West region for many years to come. In addition 327 people in the North-West are taking part in Millennium Award schemes.

It is expected that some 40,000 individuals around the country will receive Millennium Awards.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much partnership funding has been secured, and how much remains to be secured, for each of the following millennium projects *(a)* Bristol 2000, *(b)* British Museum Great Court, *(c)* Changing Places, *(d)* Dynamic Earth, *(e)* Earth Centre, *(f)* Eden Project, *(g)* Hampden Park Stadium, *(h)* International Centre for Life, *(i)* Lowry Centre, *(j)* Millennium Link, *(k)* Millennium Point, *(l)* Millennium Seedbank, *(m)* Millennium Stadium, *(n)* National Botanic Gardens of Wales, *(o)* National Discovery Park, *(p)* National Cycle Network, *(q)* National Space Science Centre, *(r)* New Technopolis, *(s)* Odyssey Park, *(t)* Remaking the Heart of the City, *(u)* Renaissance of Portsmouth Harbour, *(v)* Tate Gallery of Modern Art and *(w)* University of the Highlands and Islands Project; [58958]

(2) what is the outstanding amount of marketing funding required to complete the landmark projects sponsored to date by the Millennium Commission. [58860]

Mr. Chris Smith: These are matters for the Millennium Commission. I will reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

National Lottery

22. **Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in what ways the national lottery will benefit millennium award-winners in London. [57265]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Millennium Awards scheme is funded by the National Lottery through the Millennium Commission. To date 244 individuals in London have been awarded a total of £750,000 towards schemes to: popularise science; attend Summer University; improve the environment; and promote understanding of mental illness.

It is expected that some 40,000 individuals around the country will receive Millennium Awards.

26. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action his Department is taking to ensure *(a)* communities and *(b)* individuals are made aware of the availability of lottery funds for communities eligible for small grants; and if he will make a statement. [57269]

Mr. Banks: We are working with the Lottery distributors on a new leaflet to highlight the availability of Lottery funding. It will publicise the one-stop shop scheme for small community grants which distributors in England are planning to introduce in the East Midlands on 18 November and extend to the rest of England next spring. The scheme will also be publicised at a conference which the Department is running in Barnsley on 10 November to explore how Lottery funding can help to regenerate coalfield communities.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will provide a breakdown, by local authority area in Scotland, of the grants awarded for each National Lottery good cause. [58294]

Mr. Banks: To date 4,710 awards worth a total of £497,705,355 have been made in Scotland. A breakdown by Scottish local authorities for each good cause is in the following table.

Awards information is also available on the Lottery website at www.lottery.culture.gov.uk.

National Lottery Awards for Scotland breakdown by Local Authority and Good Cause

		Good Cause					
Local Authority	*Data*	*Arts*	*Charity*	*Heritage*	*Millennium*	*Sports*	*Grand Total*
Aberdeen City	Total Value	£1,056,852	£3,632,221	£882,507	—	£2,760,083	£8,331,663
	No. of Awards	11	74	6	0	13	104
Aberdeenshire	Total Value	£452,202	£1,749,707	£10,817,693	£327,104	£4,089,586	£17,436,292
	No. of Awards	14	132	7	1	39	193
Angus	Total Value	£208,036	£1,130,599	£30,300	—	£137,610	£1,506,545
	No. of Awards	6	72	2	0	7	87
Argyll and Bute	Total Value	£243,654	£1,238,104	£1,593,000	—	£2,103,779	£5,178,537
	No. of Awards	5	91	4	0	21	121

National Lottery Awards for Scotland breakdown by Local Authority and Good Cause

Local Authority	Data	Good Cause: Arts	Charity	Heritage	Millennium	Sports	Grand Total
City of Edinburgh	Total Value	£13,387,525	£23,097,475	£44,571,300	£32,839,845	£4,029,065	£117,925,210
	No. of Awards	97	308	50	4	23	482
City of Glasgow	Total Value	£23,981,932	£15,957,965	£24,150,607	£68,802,773	£19,191,738	£152,085,015
	No. of Awards	90	338	28	6	40	502
Clackmannanshire	Total Value	£6,000	£1,798,473	£122,100	—	£166,391	£2,092,964
	No. of Awards	1	38	2	0	3	44
Dumfries and Galloway	Total Value	1,693,580	£2,917,610	£294,893	£547,000	£1,751,365	£7,204,448
	No. of Awards	18	214	6	1	29	268
Dundee City	Total Value	£7,766,380	£2,089,598	£2,349,679	—	£3,626,250	£15,831,907
	No. of Awards	9	77	9	0	5	100
East Ayrshire	Total Value	£60,380	£1,166,828	£111,900	—	£104,982	£1,444,090
	No. of Awards	3	119	1	0	4	127
East Dunbartonshire	Total Value	£18,962	£1,570,351	—	—	£461,871	£2,051,184
	No. of Awards	3	84	0	0	9	96
East Lothian	Total Value	£1,247,737	£864,693	£8,406,774	—	£103,389	£10,622,593
	No. of Awards	4	45	6	0	7	62
East Renfrewshire	Total Value	£17,188	£783,113	—	—	£1,654,730	£2,455,031
	No. of Awards	2	33	0	0	10	45
Falkirk	Total Value	£272,522	£1,858,160	£250,000	—	£531,250	£2,911,932
	No. of Awards	5	66	1	0	3	75
Fife	Total Value	£3,548,433	£2,993,892	£1,583,927	£1,793,450	£3,058,128	£12,977,830
	No. of Awards	17	205	13	1	18	254
Highland	Total Value	£3,457,896	£6,145,477	£4,107,598	£33,354,000	£3,893,375	£50,958,346
	No. of Awards	35	293	16	1	69	414
Inverclyde	Total Value	£13,759	£1,957,205	—	—	£509,600	£2,480,564
	No. of Awards	2	48	0	0	5	55
Midlothian	Total Value	£77,068	£364,633	£5,142,764	—	£135,650	£5,720,115
	No. of Awards	3	53	11	0	4	71
Moray	Total Value	£118,990	£1,122,248	£511,729	—	£476,410	£2,229,377
	No. of Awards	7	60	3	0	13	83
North Ayrshire	Total Value	£644,380	£928,944	£228,186	£5,340,037	£1,386,540	£8,528,087
	No. of Awards	4	88	2	1	12	107
North Lanarkshire	Total Value	£623,019	£3,016,957	£704,100	—	£1,263,058	£5,607,134
	No. of Awards	8	204	3	0	13	228
Orkney Islands	Total Value	£649,600	£866,387	£924,613	£3,700,000	£489,750	£6,630,350
	No. of Awards	3	37	7	1	4	52
Perth and Kinross	Total Value	£363,642	£1,736,574	£11,826,130	—	£1,760,609	£15,686,955
	No. of Awards	8	111	14	0	19	152
Renfrewshire	Total Value	£178,694	£1,784,160	1,035,200	—	£482,725	£3,480,779
	No. of Awards	6	77	2	0	5	90
Scottish Borders	Total Value	£33,143	£1,541,926	£60,250	—	£1,290,634	£2,925,953
	No. of Awards	1	100	3	0	27	131
Shetland Islands	Total Value	£5,000	£694,858	£595,457	—	£501,000	£1,796,315
	No. of Awards	1	40	6	0	4	51
South Ayrshire	Total Value	£307,641	£1,450,656	£273,070	—	£996,583	£3,027,950
	No. of Awards	5	72	3	0	9	89
South Lanarkshire	Total Value	£572,372	£2,369,269	£4,567,520	—	£5,129,057	£12,638,218
	No. of Awards	10	228	4	0	21	263
Stirling	Total Value	£333,490	£2,256,166	£1,584,231	—	£1,351,782	£5,525,669
	No. of Awards	15	67	3	0	13	98
West Dunbartonshire	Total Value	£85,500	£1,152,478	£1,563,966	—	£501,725	£3,303,669
	No. of Awards	2	70	4	0	2	78
West Lothian	Total Value	£196,454	£1,258,432	£307,900	—	£1,502,655	£3,265,441
	No. of Awards	7	90	2	0	11	110
Western Isles	Total Value	£135,317	£1,254,992	£1,133,100	—	£1,321,783	£3,845,192
	No. of Awards	8	58	4	0	8	78
Total Value		£61,757,348	£92,750,151	£129,730,494	£146,704,209	£66,763,153	£497,705,355
Total No. of Awards		410	3,592	222	16	470	4,710

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what consultations he undertook with National Lottery distribution bodies prior to his announcement that the Millennium share would be moved into the New Opportunities Fund. [58484]

Mr. Chris Smith: We are regularly in touch with all the National Lottery distribution bodies and are conscious of the demands they are seeking to meet. We are also conscious of the potential for New Opportunities Fund (NOF) has to meet pressing needs in the fields of health,

education and the environment. That is why, as well as announcing that NOF will inherit the Millennium stream, we also announced that each of the arts, sport, heritage and charities can plan on an extra £50 million from the Lottery between now and 2001 and that they are each guaranteed 16 per cent. of Lottery revenues from October 2001 onwards.

Employment

23. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people are employed in the cultural and creative industries. [57266]

Mr. Chris Smith: On Friday I published a document, produced on behalf of the Creative Industries Task Force, which I chair, which attempts to analyse for the first time the economic impact of the diverse and dynamic sectors which constitute the creative industries. We estimate the creative industries to turn over nearly £60 billion a year and to employ 1½ million people, making them an increasingly significant element in the national economy.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will ascertain the number of asylum seekers in representative British national sports teams, or who have competed in such teams over the last two years; and if he will facilitate arrangements for their travel for overseas events. [58547]

Mr. Banks: Britain competes in a great many sports internationally and at many levels including youth teams. Unfortunately I do not have this information and I think it would be costly, and in some cases an imposition on the governing bodies of the sports concerned, to try to collate it. However, I would be delighted to discuss with the hon. Member any individual cases or difficulty of which he is aware and explore what action is open to the Government to facilitate arrangements for travel for overseas events.

Sport (Women)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when *(a)* he and *(b)* the Minister for Sport last met the Minister for Women to discuss the role of women in sport. [58483]

Mr. Banks: I have been in contact with my noble Friend the Minister for Women about women in sport and will be meeting with her to discuss this very soon. Officials in my Department are in contact with officials in the Government's Women's Unit to discuss issues relating to women and sport.

I remain determined to find ways to encourage and promote women in sport. We shall be looking at further ways to do so.

Lottery Funding (Witney)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many bids for Lottery funding for arts projects in the Witney constituency *(a)* have been received, *(b)* have been awarded, giving amounts and *(c)* are still outstanding, since the establishment of the National Lottery; [57562]

(2) what proportion of total Lottery funding for arts projects and sports projects has been awarded to such projects in the Witney constituency since the establishment of the National Lottery; [57563]

(3) how many bids for Lottery funding for sports projects in the Witney constituency *(a)* have been received, *(b)* have been awarded, giving amounts and *(c)* are still outstanding, since the establishment of the National Lottery. [57561]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* To date the National Lottery distributors have awarded £5.03 billion to 31,000 projects across the United Kingdom. In England, the Arts Council of England has announced grants totalling £963,271,382 to 7,411 projects. The English Sports Council has announced grants totalling £753,348,968 to 2,679 projects. The figures for the Witney constituency are set out in the table:

Witney	*Arts projects*	*Sports projects*
Number of applications	30	27
Outstanding applications	6	0
Successful applications	12	15
Value of successful applications (£)	817,552	1,411,853
Value as per cent. of England	0.8	1.87

Information on successful Lottery applicants can be found on the Department's website www.lottery.culture.gov.uk.

Running Tracks

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the safety checks introduced by British Athletics 98 on the number of all-weather running tracks available for use; and what assistance his Department will provide to local authorities to replace all-weather running tracks which have been declared unsafe by British Athletics. [57893]

Mr. Banks: No direct assessment has been made of the impact of the safety checks on the number of all-weather running tracks available for use. However, the English Sports Council (ESC) has provided financial and other support services to UK Athletics '98 over the last year to produce a national facilities strategy. This is due for publication and promotion in December 1998. The strategy recognises that the sport needs to encourage better management and maintenance of existing all weather tracks, which are predominantly owned and managed by local authorities.

No direct assistance from the UK Sports Council (UKSC) or ESC has been provided to local authorities to replace all-weather tracks which have been declared unsafe. However, both the UKSC and ESC are planning to provide exchequer funding to the new national governing body, Athletics UK, to support a new staffing structure which will include a full-time Facilities Co-ordinator post. This post will enable the sport to provide more pro-active advice and better services to local authorities and other track providers as to what is best practice with regard to the management of athletics stadia. In addition, local authorities may also apply to the ESC for a grant from

the Lottery Sports Fund to help build new or upgraded facilities. Around £250 million of Lottery Grants will be awarded to sport in 1998–99.

Sportsmatch

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the future of Sportsmatch; and what effect the changes in its operation will have on his departmental budget. [58019]

Mr. Banks: Sportsmatch is a successful scheme which brings in much needed business sponsorship to the previously neglected area of grass roots sport. We have made it clear that we would like to see distributors come forward with new ideas for opening up Lottery funds to smaller community sports initiatives and we believe there may be links here to be made with the Sportsmatch approach. We have consulted on the future of Sportsmatch in England on this basis.

The starting point of the consultation was that greater synergy would best be achieved by transferring in full responsibility and funding for the Sportsmatch scheme from the Department to the English Sports Council with effect from April 1999. The funds would be ring fenced for the first financial year at least while the Council reviews with the scheme's managers the options for the future. Longer term arrangements would be decided following discussion of the review with Ministers. The aim would be to ensure that the grant-in-aid, lottery funding, and Sportsmatch money could be deployed in a synchronised way. Responses to the consultation have now been received and are being considered.

Departmental Guarantees

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what guarantees his Department has made in monetary terms to *(a)* arts, *(b)* sport, *(c)* charities, *(d)* heritage, *(e)* projects to mark the Millennium and *(f)* the New Opportunities Fund. [58020]

Mr. Chris Smith: As a result of my Department's overall settlement from the Comprehensive Spending Review, I have been consulting on my proposals for the allocation of the £290 million additional investment which I have received. This is investment for reform and modernisation and in exchange I expect to see improvements in efficiency, access and modernisation. I anticipate being able to provide institutional allocations in early December.

The arts, sport, heritage and charities Lottery good causes can now plan on receiving an extra £50 million by the end of the present licence period in September 2001, bringing their forecast income by then to over £1.85 billion each. Thereafter they have each been guaranteed one sixth of Lottery revenues for good causes.

The Millennium Commission has been guaranteed an income of £2.017 billion over its funding lifetime.

The New Opportunities Fund will receive around £1.2 billion during the licence period. Once the millennium stream has closed down, NOF's share of Lottery revenues will rise to one third.

Digital Broadcasting

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the extent to which the move to digital broadcasting will allow reception of appropriate regional variations of BBC and ITV in *(a)* West Norfolk and *(b)* other regions unable to receive local programming. [57264]

Janet Anderson: The Government's priority is the successful launch of digital television and the expansion in choice it will bring. By the end of 1999 digital terrestrial television will cover 90 per cent. of the UK population and be supplemented by digital cable and satellite services. At this stage, we have made no assessment of what additional benefits digital broadcasting might bring in terms of further local programming.

Regional Orchestras

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his policy on regional orchestras. [57255]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Government policy on the arts is guided by a desire to promote excellence, access, innovation and education. Our regional orchestras play a valuable role in this, by opening up to a wide range of people the enjoyment of music of the highest standards.

Football (Youth Development)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much of the English Sports Council's promised annual funding for youth development has been disbursed to lower league football clubs. [57159]

Mr. Banks: The English Sports Council has made available £20 million over the next four years from the Lottery Sports Fund for the establishment of new academies or centres of excellence for Football League clubs. This money is to be matched pound for pound by the FA Premier League. The English Sports Council take the final decision on applications from this source. The Council has recently allocated £5.8 million over the next four years to 22 Football League Clubs—the first allocation under this initiative. The Premier League will be allocating a similar sum.

Artistic Heritage

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has held in the past year on proposals to protect the United Kingdom's artistic heritage from export. [57180]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The UK's artistic heritage is already well protected by our present system of export controls. Ministers have not within the past year discussed proposals for improving them.

Film Industry

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the new Film Export Trade body was established; and how often it has met. [58486]

Janet Anderson: Film Export UK was established on 25 September this year as a division of the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT). To date it has held two meetings.

Royal Parks (Car Parking)

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 29 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *267*, what assessment he has made of the impact of weekend charges for parking in the Royal Parks on *(a)* parking and *(b)* road safety in neighbouring streets where no charges are levied; and what representations he has received from residents. [58225]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 4 November 1998]:* The Agency undertook a consultation exercise to solicit the views of interested parties before making a final decision on the amendments to regulations affecting Hyde Park and Regent's Park.

Those consulted include the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the neighbouring local authorities, local interest groups, including residents' associations, and the four local MPs. The original proposals were amended as a result of the responses received.

The level of charges is designed to improve traffic management, and is pitched at a level to minimise displacement of traffic and avoid increasing on-street parking in the vicinity. The changes are consistent with government policy on traffic, parking and transport in London.

DEFENCE

Air-to-air Missiles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the criteria required in the invitation to tender for the Staff Requirement (Air) 1239 for a beyond visual range air-to-air missile. [58523]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on 6 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *354*.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those companies which have been invited to tender for the SR(A) 1239. [58525]

Mr. Spellar: SR(A)1239 refers to our requirement for a Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile for Eurofighter. Invitations to tender were issued in December 1995 to the following companies:

a) BAe Dynamics, Stevenage.

b) Hughes Aircraft Co., Tuscon, USA.

c) Daimler-Benz, Germany.

d) Alenia, Italy.

e) Matra-Defence, France.

f) GEC-Marconi, Stanmore.

g) Aerospatiale, France.

h) Saab Dynamics, Sweden.

i) Raytheon Electronic Systems, Bedford.

Responses were received from Matra BAe Dynamics and Hughes Aircraft Co., now Raytheon Systems Ltd. Following initial evaluation, it was decided to conduct a project Definition/Risk Reduction phase, and further Invitations to Tender were issued to both companies in October 1997.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from other EU countries on the Staff Requirement (Air) 1239 for a beyond visual range air-to-air missile. [58524]

Mr. Spellar: Although SR(A)1239 is to meet a UK requirement for a Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile for Eurofighter, our Eurofighter Partner Nations, Germany, Italy and Spain, have similar requirements, as do Sweden for their JAS 39 Gripen aircraft, and have agreed to be associated with our competition. We are assessing the bids jointly and are exploring the possibility of meeting our requirements through a common solution.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there will be a reduction in the number of warheads produced at Aldermaston as a result of the alterations to the United Kingdom's nuclear posture announced in the Strategic Defence Review; and if he will make a statement. [58144]

Mr. George Robertson: We announced in the Strategic Defence Review that a stockpile of fewer than 200 operationally available nuclear warheads was required to meet our future needs, a reduction from the maximum of 300 announced by the previous Government. There will, therefore, be a reduction in the number of warheads produced at the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if all UK Trident missiles are *(a)* deployed, *(b)* held as part of a processing margin or *(c)* to be used in test firings; [58148]

(2) if the total holding of operational nuclear warheads, as revised by the Strategic Defence Review, provides the potential to deploy more than 48 warheads per Trident submarine; [58149]

(3) under what circumstances the Government would consider further reducing the number of nuclear warheads deployed on UK Trident submarines. [58150]

Mr. George Robertson: Our Trident operating posture, including the number of warheads deployed, is based on a rigorous assessment of the minimum necessary to provide credible deterrence. Should changes in strategic circumstances lead to a change in that assessment, we would make corresponding adjustments to our deployed posture. The Strategic Defence Review decisions on missile numbers and the stockpile of operationally available warheads are based on an assessment of the worst circumstances which might arise during Trident's life, however remote they may seem today, and thus provide potential to deploy additional weapons should that

ever become necessary. In addition, total stockpile numbers also take account of processing margins and, in the case of missiles, anticipated test firings.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the number of nuclear weapons held as a necessary processing margin or for technical surveillance purposes will increase as a result of the Strategic Defence Review. [55870]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 28 October 1998]:* There will be no increase in the number of nuclear weapons held as a processing margin or for technical surveillance purposes as a result of the Strategic Defence Review. However, there will be an increase in the number of nuclear warheads awaiting dismantlement.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any UK Trident missiles are deployed without nuclear warheads. [58151]

Mr. George Robertson: Disclosing the information requested would assist a potential adversary to calculate our capabilities and would therefore be harmful to deterrence. Consequently I am withholding the information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Defence, Security and International Relations).

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United Kingdom's sub-strategic nuclear capability deployed on Trident missiles has been reduced as a result of the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review compared with the previous Government's deployments. [58152]

Mr. George Robertson: We stated in the Strategic Defence Review White Paper that each Trident submarine will carry the reduced load of 48 warheads when on deterrent patrol. This compares with the previous Government's announced ceiling of 96. The reduced load of 48 warheads will meet both our strategic and sub-strategic requirements in current Strategic circumstances. Details on the breakdown of this number is classified as this information could be used to provide insights into the precise capability of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent. I am therefore witholding this information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the cost implications of reducing the number of warheads deployed on UK Trident submarines; [58143]

(2) what financial savings will arise from the Government's revised total holdings of operational nuclear warheads. [58147]

Mr. George Robertson: The decision in the Strategic Defence Review that the operationally available stockpile will consist of less than 200 warheads is expected to result in financial savings of some £22 million in the cost of the nuclear warhead programme over the next ten years. There will also be savings of some £50 million from the associated decision to limit to 58 the purchase of Trident missile bodies.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Strategic Defence Review, Supporting Essays, Essay 5, paragraph 47, when the detailed review of national responses to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will be completed; and when a summary of the conclusions will be made public. [58142]

Mr. George Robertson: As I indicated to the House during the debate on the Strategic Defence Review on 19 October 1998, *Official Report,* column 978, I plan to report the conclusions of the review to the House shortly.

Gibraltar

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many submarines of *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the US Navy and *(c)* other navies have docked at the Z-berth at Gibraltar during 1998. [58750]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The information requested is as follows: as at 1 November, 2 Royal Navy and 9 US Navy submarines had used the Z berths in Gibraltar during 1998. A number of US Navy submarines have visited Gibraltar on more than one occasion and in total they have made 15 visits this year. No submarines from other navies have docked at the Gibraltar Z berths during this period.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by month and name the Royal Navy vessels which have visited Gibraltar during 1998. [58751]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The following Royal Navy vessels have visited Gibraltar during 1998, up to and including 1 November:

Month	*HMS*	*RFA*
January	Bridport	Diligence
	Illustrious	—
	Inverness	—
	Sandown	—
February	Cornwall	—
	Illustrious	—
	Richmond	—
	Somerset	—
March	Beaver	Orangeleaf
	Cornwall	—
	Richmond	—
	York	—
April	Beaver	Bayleaf
	Cornwall	—
	Grafton	—
	Nottingham	—
May	Bulldog	Grey Rover
	Coventry	—
	Marlborough	—
June	Gloucester(3)	Sea Crusader
July	Cardiff	Fort Victoria
	Marlborough	—
August	Cardiff	Bayleaf
	Cornwall	Oakleaf
	Somerset	Orangeleaf
	—	Sea Crusader
	—	Sir Bedivere(2)

Month	HMS	RFA
September	Birmingham(2)	—
	Cumberland	—
	London	—
	Somerset	—
October	Nottingham	Bayleaf
	Scott	—
	York	—

HM Ships Ranger and Trumpeter are based at Gibraltar and have made the following port calls:

Month	Ranger	Trumpeter
January	—	—
February	—	—
March	—	—
April	1	2
May	1	2
June	1	2
July	1	1
August	—	1
September	4	4
October	3	3

In addition, two Royal Navy submarines have visited Gibraltar during this period. They were the Swiftshure class submarine, HMS Spartan, in January and HMS Turbulent (Trafalgar class) in November.

Army Pilots

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Army squadrons currently have a shortage of trained pilots; and what is the total extent of the shortfalls. [57188]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As at 27 October 44 established posts on Army squadrons were vacant, out of a total establishment of 544. Of 18 Army squadrons, the following 12 were affected: 651, 652, 661, 653, 662, 663, 659, 669, 655, 656, 657 and 664.

RAF (Medical Retirement)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force personnel have left the service on health grounds in each of the last five years. [57161]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The following number of regular Royal Air Force personnel have been medically discharged in each year since 1993. These figures do not include RAF personnel who died in service.

Year	Medical discharges
1993	147
1994	121
1995	207
1996	200
1997	222
1998 at 27 October 1998	92

Note:
Based on information supplied to DASA as at 27 October 1998.

TAVR

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people served in the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve in *(a)* May 1979 and *(b)* May 1997; and how many are serving at the present time. [57175]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The strengths of the Territorial Army in 1979, 1997 and at present are as follows:

Year	Number
1979	[1]59,400
1997	[2]55,900
1998	[3]54,100

[1] Figure as at 1 April 1979 which is the closest available to the May figure requested
[2] Figure as at 1 May 1997
[3] Figure as at 1 September 1998

198 Field Park Squadron

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the net saving to the defence budget of removing 198 Field Park Squadron from the TA order of battle. [57582]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The operating costs alone for 198 Field Park Squadron in the financial year 1997–98 were £179,000.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of maintaining the garrison in the Falklands over each of the next five years. [57855]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The cost of the Falklands garrison in the current financial year 1998–99 is expected to be just over £70 million. In the absence of significant modifications to the size and shape of the garrison, which are not currently foreseen, its cost is likely to continue to be roughly of this order in each of the next five years.

Menwith Hill

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* American military personnel, *(b)* American civilian personnel, *(c)* GCHQ personnel and *(d)* RAF military and civilian personnel are present at Menwith Hill Station. [57316]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* As at 9 October 1998, at RAF Menwith Hill there were 435 US military personnel, 935 US civilian personnel and 416 RAF and Ministry of Defence civilian personnel. I am withholding the numbers of operationally deployed GCHQ staff under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the name and rank of the officer in charge at Menwith Hill Station. [57317]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* Squadron Leader Ted Sumner is the senior RAF officer at the site while the US base commander is Colonel Joseph Brand of the United States Army.

Infra Red System

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the two radomes which are to be part of the space-based infra red system will be constructed. [57313]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding reply 3 November 1998]:* Construction of the two radomes at RAF Menwith Hill is due to begin in November 1999 and is scheduled for completion in February 2000. The radomes will support the new US Space Based Infra-Red System, providing early warning of ballistic missile launches.

Dismissals and Courts Martial

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks have been dismissed from the service or court-martialled in each of the last five years. [58299]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The table shows the total number of Army personnel who have been court-martialled (CM) and or dismissed from the service over the last 5 years.

Army personnel	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*Total*
Officers court martialled	13	13	9	7	12	54
Officers dismissed by court martial	5	8	4	2	5	24
Officers dismissed for mis-conduct	3	8	12	2	1	26
Other ranks court martialled	646	583	414	359	287	2,289
Other ranks dismissed by court martial	236	275	241	159	100	1,011
Other ranks dismissed for mis-conduct	394	308	199	149	89	1,139

RAF Halton

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the terms and conditions of the original transfer from the Rothschild family to the Government of land at Halton, Buckinghamshire, now occupied by RAF Halton; and if he will make a statement. [58288]

Mr. Spellar: If the Rothschild Foundation agrees to the public release of this document which is a commercial agreement between us, then a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF High Wycombe

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for new building works at RAF High Wycombe. [58691]

Mr. Spellar: A Framework Development Plan was presented to Wycombe District Council earlier this year, outlining key proposals for future development of the RAF High Wycombe site.

There are two main proposals: first, to replace the site reception and RAF Police Flight Portakabin-style facilities with a permanent building; secondly, to replace two other buildings, used by Headquarters Strike Command, which are over 25 years old and nearing the end of their useful and economic life. The new buildings would provide modern facilities that meet current statutory legislation and provide suitable long-term office accommodation for staff. The proposals would address Wycombe District Council's concern over temporary buildings, the visual impact of the proposed developments when viewed from outside the site, and for landscape improvements, such as tree planting, on the RAF High Wycombe site.

Planning permission has been sought from Wycombe District Council for the reception/RAF Police Flight facilities. It is intended to present Outline Planning Permission application for replacing the HQ Strike Command buildings in the near future.

Legal Actions

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent in legal fees when dealing with legal action against it by current or former service men and women in each of the last 10 years. [58145]

Mr. Spellar: Information on legal fees relating to common law compensation claims submitted by current and former Service personnel has been held centrally only since 1 April 1994. The figures cover legal fees and disbursements.

Year	*Total*
1994–95	5,236,252
1995–96	5,850,585
1996–97	5,169,018
1997–98	6,328,685
1 April 1998 to 4 November 1998	4,269,161
Total	26,853,701

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for damages have been brought against his Department by current and former service men and women in each of the last 10 years. [58146]

Mr. Spellar: The number of common law claims for damages brought against my Department from serving and former Service men and women in each of the last ten complete calendar years was:

Year	*Total*
1988	444
1989	606
1990	677
1991	926
1992	990
1993	1,195
1994	1,147
1995	1,275
1996	1,148
1997	1,117

RAF (Training Accidents)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many RAF aircraft have been lost in training accidents in each of the last 10 years; [58140]

(2) how many RAF flight crew have *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in training accidents in each of the last 10 years. [58141]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. and learned Member and a copy of my reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

RNAD Trecwn

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what nuclear weapons or items were stored at the former RNAD Trecwn; and what licensing was required for them to be stored there. [58594]

Mr. Spellar: No nuclear weapons or items were stored at the former RNAD Trecwn. The question of licensing does not therefore arise.

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies and individuals other than WR Trust, including estate agents, were allowed access to the RNAD Trecwn site during the run-up to bidding in all bidding rounds. [58595]

Mr. Spellar: Access to RNAD Trecwn was granted to all companies and individuals who wished to visit the site during the run-up to bidding. From records kept of all visitors to the site, 114 individuals, including representatives from various companies and estate agents, took up the opportunity to inspect the site prior to bidding.

Chile

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *441*, if he will identify which of the 21 meetings General Pinochet was present at; where and when such meetings took place; and which ministers were present. [58777]

Mr. Doug Henderson: General Pinochet was not present at any of these meetings.

St. Dunstan's

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to provide grants to assist the work of St. Dunstan's in caring for men and women blinded in the service of their country. [58244]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We are very conscious of the great efforts made by organisations such as St. Dunstan's to assist former Service personnel, and know how greatly their work is valued both by the present service community and by ex-Service men and women.

However, it is the longstanding practice of central Government not to finance charities' core activities. Therefore, as with all registered charities, St. Dunstan's—as a wholly independent charity—raises its own funding.

Under Section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, there are powers for central Government to fund voluntary organisations whose activities support the Department of Health's policy objectives relating to health, and personal and social services. However, the budget is finite and more applications are received than it is possible to meet. I am given to understand that an application from the Diana Gubbay Trust for the Blind which is administered by St. Dunstan's, and provides care for visually impaired people who are ex-members of the Armed Forces or civilian services but whose blindness is not attributable to their service has been received this year and will be given serious consideration.

The Government provide considerable assistance for disabled ex-Service personnel, including St. Dunstaners. Personnel deemed to have sustained a disability due to service in the Armed Forces qualify for a tax-free War Pension from the War Pensions Agency. In addition, most Service personnel are members of The Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS), which ordinarily pays an immediate pension on completion of 16 years' service in the case of officers and 22 years in the case of non-commissioned personnel. The AFPS also provides pensions to most Servicemen or Servicewomen who are medically discharged from their Service. Additional benefits may be paid if a disability is deemed to be attributable to or aggravated by Service. Attributable benefits are payable irrespective of length of service or whether the individual is a member of the AFPS.

Requisitioned Land

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list British Army military installations that are sited on requisitioned land; when his officials last had contact with the landowners of each site; and what plans he has to return the land to its original use. [56395]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The Army's installations, that are entirely or partly sited on requisitioned land, are listed.

County Armagh:

Cloghoge Base, Newry
Crossmaglen Base
Keady Base
Newtownhamilton Base

County Down:

Rathfriland Base

County Fermanagh:

Annaghmartin Patrol Base
Clonatty Bridge Patrol Base
Gortmullan Patrol Base
Mullan Bridge Patrol Base
Rosscor Bridge Patrol Base
Wattle Bridge Patrol Base

County Londonderry:

Masonic Base

County Tyrone:

Aughnacloy Permanent Vehicle Check Point
Cookstown Base
St. Lucia Base

Belfast:

Fort Whiterock Base.

Apart from the initial serving of the Requisition Order my officials do not have any contact with landowners except where a landowner wishes to raise a particular matter concerning that Order.

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) is responsible for compensation arising from Requisition Orders and payment of rents is made by the Compensation Agency on behalf of the NIO. The Compensation Agency would therefore have contact with the landowners due to their responsibility for the rent.

The requirement for bases and installations is kept under constant review and the improvement in the security situation allowed for the planned removal of the Aughnacloy Permanent Vehicle Check Point which was announced by the Chief Constable on 30 September 1998. The closure and planned removal of the Fort Whiterock base in West Belfast was announced by the Chief Constable on 26 October 1998. As the security situation improves there may be scope for further measures; however, there are no plans for additional bases to be removed from requisitioned land at the present time.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* serving and *(b)* former members of the Royal Irish Regiment held personal protection firearms on 10 April; how many new weapons have been issued since then; and how many weapons have been handed in. [56296]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* There are two types of Personal Protection Weapons (PPWs) which can be held by personnel of the Royal Irish Regiment (R IRISH). These are MOD-issued PPWs, and privately owned and purchased PPWs held on Fire Arms Certificates (FAC) which are issued and renewed every 3 years by the RUC Firearms Licensing Branch.

My Department does not hold details of R IRISH PPW holdings as at 10 April 1998. However, information on holdings based on returns collected from units between 21 April 1998 and 6 July are given in the table.

Table 1

MOD issued PPW	*PPWs held under Fire Arms Certificate*	*Total*
1,172	758	1,930

Details of PPW holdings as at 22 October 1998 are given in the table.

Table 2

MOD issued PPW	*PPWs held under Fire Arms Certificate*	*Total*
1,083	751	1,834

Table 2 shows holdings of 96 fewer PPWs on 22 October, than between 21 April and 6 July; this represents 97 weapons handed in, and one new weapon issued.

My Department does not hold records of PPW issued under Firearms Certificates to former members of R IRISH.

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56801]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56799]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–71*.

Naval Bases and Supply Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to make a decision on the proposed partnership between Matra-BAe UK Ltd and the Naval Bases and Supply Agency at RNAD Gosport; [57170]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the proposed partnership between Matra-BAe UK Ltd and the Naval Bases and Supply Agency at RNAD Gosport. [57169]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have now completed the formal consultation process with the Trades Unions over the proposed Partnering Arrangement between the Naval Bases and Supply Agency and Matra-BAe UK Ltd. The Trade Unions are fully supportive of the proposed arrangement, recognising that this presents an opportunity for both parties to secure the benefits of skills exchange and the optimum utilisation of resources and facilities.

My Department has received no other representations on the Partnering Arrangement.

We expect the formal signing of the Partnering Arrangement, between MBUK Ltd. and the Naval Bases and Supply Agency will take place shortly.

HEALTH

Hospital Doctors

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many senior registrars are in post in each specialty; and how many have been given consultants posts in each of the last [illegible] years. [56741]

Mr. M[illegible]n: Copies of the information requested will be placed in the Library. On 1 April 1996, the Specialist Registrar (SpR) grade was introduced. Existing registrars and senior registrars were given the option to enter the SpR grade. Since 1 April 1997, those Senior House Officers who are eligible and wish to enter higher specialist medical training have been able to do so only by entering the SpR grade.

Clinical Psychologists

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate the average life-time earnings of a clinical psychologist working in the NHS at current prices; [56449]

(2) what are the mean and modal salaries of fully qualified clinical psychologists; [56575]

(3) if he will list the real rates of increase in each pay award for clinical psychologists working for the NHS since 1990; [56444]

(4) what was the total salary bill for clinical psychologists in the NHS in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [56446]

Mr. Milburn: The current national pay scales for qualified clinical psychologists employed in the National Health Service range from £14,690 to £33,474 (in Grade A) and from £32,185 to £53,593 in Grade B. The latest Departmental survey of NHS earnings 1997 gives a mean salary figure of £33,100 and £42,600 for the modal salary, rounded to the nearest £100.

Total salary bill information, including employers contributions, is collected and monitored locally by trusts. Information on the total salary bill is not collected centrally. The real rates at which clinical psychologists pay has changed as a result of pay awards since 1990 are shown in the table.

Changes to Clinical Psychologists' pay in real terms: NHS pay awards 1990–98

Percentage

Clinical psychologists' pay awards in year change	*Pay settlement*	*GDP factor*	*Real terms increase*
1990–91 over 1989–90	7.90	7.83	0.07
1991–92 over 1990–91	7.90	6.20	1.70
1992–93 over 1991–92	4.75	3.31	1.44
1993–94 over 1992–93	1.50	2.66	–1.16
1994–95 over 1993–94	2.35	1.43	0.92
1995–96 over 1994–95	3.00	2.91	0.09
1996–97 over 1995–96	2.80	3.08	–0.28
1997–98 over 1996–97	2.43	2.60	–0.17
1998–99 over 1997–98	3.47	2.90	0.57

Notes:

1. The pay awards have been compared with the gross domestic product deflator to obtain real terms increases/reductions.
2. The pay awards represent annual changes of pay over each financial year (1 April to 31 March) since 1990 and includes the 1998 settlement.
3. The effect of staging the 1997 and 1998 pay awards has been taken into account.

Maternity Units

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital maternity units in *(a)* the North West of England and *(b)* England have been (i) closed and (ii) merged since 1 May 1997. [57179]

Mr. Milburn: No hospital maternity units in the north west of England have been closed or merged since 1 May 1997.

Five hospital maternity units in England have closed since 1 May 1997, as part of local service developments. In one of these cases this change followed a merger.

Midwives

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives have been subject to personal attack in the last year. [57599]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, officials in the National Health Service Executive are currently analysing the results of a survey of violent incidents in all trusts against all staff. The information from this survey will be used to set performance targets for the reduction of violent incidents. Violence to NHS staff is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average pay for midwives; and how this has varied in percentage terms in each of the last two years. [57597]

Mr. Milburn: The great majority of midwives are graded E (salary range £14,705 to £17,030 from 1 December 1998), grade F (salary range £16,310 to £19,985 from 1 December 1998) or grade G (salary range £19,420 to £22,255 from 1 December 1998), with some at higher grades ranging up to the maximum of the Senior Midwife pay scale (currently £48,820 plus the possibility of local pay). Midwives may also receive significant extra earnings for evening, night or weekend duty. Midwives' on grades F, G, H and I are also eligible for discretionary points which could mean up to an extra £1,195 per year. Midwives' pay is based on the recommendations of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine. The pay award for the 1997–98 year was 3.3 per cent. (paid as 2 per cent. from 1 April 1997, 3.3 per cent. from 1 December 1997) and for 1998–99 3.8 per cent. (paid 2 per cent. from 1 April 1998, 3.8 per cent. from 1 December 1998).

Norwich Community Health Partnership NHS Trust

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Norwich Community Health Partnership NHS Trust positions are currently vacant. [57488]

Mr. Milburn: There is currently one vacancy for a non-executive director on the board of the Norwich Community Health Partnership NHS Trust.

Dental Fluorosis

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the incidence of dental fluorosis in children, and its relationship to areas where the fluoride levels in the public water supply exceed one part per million. [57461]

Mr. Milburn: A national survey of children's dental health is undertaken every ten years. The 1993 survey, in which the teeth of over 17,000 children aged between five and fifteen years attending state schools throughout the United Kingdom were examined, was the first survey to include examination for enamel opacities. Some 1,700 12-year-olds were examined of whom 39 per cent. had one or more enamel opacity. We estimate that about half of these opacities could have been due to dental fluorosis which is a cosmetic effect which, where required, can often be removed by non-invasive dental procedures. The sample was not large enough to investigate any correlation between the incidence of opacities and the level of fluoride in drinking water, but this will be among the items considered in the planning of the next survey.

Ongar War Memorial Hospital

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the Ongar War Memorial Hospital. [57408]

Mr. Milburn: We will announce our decision when we have given full and proper consideration to the proposals.

NHS Funding

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average annual real terms percentage increase in funding for the NHS between 1979 and 1997; and what is the equivalent figure for the next three years. [57464]

Mr. Milburn: During the years 1979–80 to 1997–98, the annual average real terms increase in National Health Service total net expenditure in England was 3.1 per cent. The annual average real terms increase for 1999–2000 to 2001–2002 is 4.7 per cent.

Pre-birth Care

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what payments are made to *(a)* doctors and *(b)* midwives for undertaking pre-birth care. [57595]

Mr. Milburn: Fees as set out in paragraph 1, Schedule 1 of the Statement of Fees and allowances are payable to general practitioners for the provision of maternity medical services.

Basic salaries for midwives and hospital obstetricians already include payment for undertaking pre-birth care, as this is part of their normal duties.

Nurses

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of nurses are employed in the National Health Service on a part-time basis; and if he will make a statement. [57863]

Mr. Milburn: The proportion of nurses directly employed by the National Health Service in England on a part-time basis (including those employed through a nursing 'bank') was 47 per cent. at September 1997. This is equivalent to 33 per cent. if part-time staff are counted in terms of full-time equivalents, for example where an employee working half the hours of a full-time employee is counted as 0.5.

Palliative Care

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by former regional health authorities and NHS Executive Regions, the number of *(a)* palliative care in-patient beds and *(b)* day and respite care places per 100,000 population for each year since 1990. [58180]

Mr. Milburn: The number of palliative care in-patient beds (and beds per 100,000) for each year from 1990 is shown in tables which are available in the Library. Information on the number of home care and day care services is available only for 1997 and 1998. This information is collected annually by the Hospice Information Service at St. Christopher's Hospice.

Interpreters

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* demand for, and *(b)* cost of, interpreters employed on (i) a contract and (ii) a casual basis by East Kent hospitals and the East Kent Health Authority. [57548]

Mr. Milburn: The demand for foreign language interpreters in East Kent has increased since the arrival of asylum seekers from Eastern Europe.

The health authority has paid a full year cost of £19,000 for an asylum seekers nurse. In addition to this the Health Authority has paid £7,000 on interpreting services. Local hospitals also use on an ad-hoc basis and at no significant cost, a telephone service provided by an external organisation.

Organophosphates

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research the Government have commissioned on the effects of organophosphates using human subjects; [57867]

(2) what reports the Government routinely receive from independent research bodies relating to the effects of organosphosphates on human subjects. [57866]

Ms Jowell: I refer my hon. Friend to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food publication PB 3814: "Official Group on OPs Report to Ministers" which gives details of all Government-funded research and development projects with a direct relevance to organophosphates. Copies are available in the Library.

The Government do not routinely receive reports from independent research bodies relating to the effects of organosphosphates (OPs) on human subjects. However, as part of the approvals processes for products containing OPs, from time to time, data which have been obtained using human subjects may be submitted to the regulatory authorities by manufacturers. I also refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave him on 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1057*, which gave more information about the circumstances in which research data on human subjects may be required.

Information Technology

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to modernise information technology in the NHS. [57740]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper "The new NHS—Modern, Dependable" made it clear that the National Health Service has to be underpinned by modern information technology. Together with leaders from the clinical professions, we launched our £1 billion strategy for achieving this on 24 September 1998. Entitled Information for Health, our strategy will support the many important actions that need to be taken between now and 2005. Copies of the strategy are available in the Library.

Ear, Nose and Throat Services

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had regarding the proposed transfer of ear, nose and throat services from Cheltenham General Hospital to Gloucester Royal Hospital. [57884]

Mr. Milburn: Officials at the south and west regional office of the National Health Service Executive have had informal discussions with Gloucestershire Health Authority about the proposed transfer of ear, nose and

throat services from Cheltenham General Hospital to Gloucestershire Royal Hospital in the course of their normal performance management duties.

Strokes

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount of funding provided for research into strokes in the last five years for which figures are available. [58105]

Ms Jowell: The Government fund health and medical research in a number of ways:

The Department funds research and development to support its work on policy development and evaluation in health and social care. The Department also manages the National Health Service research and development levy which is used to support research and development of relevance to the NHS both in NHS hospitals, general practice and other health care settings, and to fund the NHS research and development programme.

In addition, the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry, funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the research base. The Scottish Office Department of Health (SO) also fund research.

Central records show the following expenditure:

Strokes

£

Year	*DH*[1]	*MRC*[2]	*SO*
1993–94	[1]—	n/a	142,000
1994–95	[1]—	2,086,000	115,000
1995–96	[1]—	2,207,000	134,000
1996–97	[1]—	2,560,000	232,000
1997–98	[1]—	[3]3,319,000	867,000

[1] Further funding may be being provided by the Department of Health through the NHS R&D Levy detailed information about which is not held centrally.
[2] The MRC also funds basic research including the study of molecules and cells, genetics and infections and immunity which will inform research in this area.
[3] Approximately £6 million since 1994—It is not possible to give accurate annual spend. Projects include those in areas related to stroke.
[4] Plus £2 million investment at Cambridge Cerebrovascular Centre
Note:
n/a indicates figures not available.

Cancer

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount of funding provided for research into *(a)* breast cancer, *(b)* childhood leukaemia, *(c)* cervical cancer, *(d)* prostate cancer, *(e)* colon cancer and *(f)* lung cancer for the last five years for which figures are available. [58104]

Ms Jowell: The Government fund health and medical research in a number of ways:

The Department funds research and development to support its work on policy development and evaluation in health and social care. The Department also manages the National Health Service research and development levy which is used to support research and development of relevance to the NHS both in NHS hospitals, general practice and other health care settings, and to fund the NHS research and development programme.

In addition, the Medical Research Council, which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry, funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the research base. The Scottish Office Department of Health (SO) also fund research.

Industry and medical research charities also make a substantial investment in cancer research.

Central records show:

£000

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Breast cancer					
DH[2]	725	888	972	953	832
MRC[3]	[1]n/a	3,641	2,854	3,098	3,328
SO	111	148	306	274	179
All leukaemia[4]					
DH[2]	—	—	—	—	48
MRC	[1]n/a	2,925	2,780	2,384	2,527
Childhood leukaemia					
SO	3	0	14	15	32
Cervical cancer					
DH[2]	99	66	0	0	0
MRC[3]	[1]n/a	432	445	543	460
SO	14	0	0	0	0
Prostate cancer					
DH[2]	[1]n/a	8	69	68	29
MRC[3]	[1]n/a	0	0	73	18
SO	0	0	0	0	0
Colon cancer (Bowel cancer)					
DH[2]	46	37	35	209	197
MRC[3]	[1]n/a	623	873	1,207	1,469
SO	85	59	64	81	100
Lung cancer					
DH[2]	100	160	171	428	187
MRC[3]	[1]n/a	990	718	691	691
SO	0	12	43	35	0

[1] n/a indicates figures not available.
[2] Further funding may be being provided by the Department of Health through the NHS R&D Levy—detailed information about which is not held centrally.
[3] The MRC are also supporting 11 trials in the relevant cancers. The MRC also funds basic research including the study of molecules and cells, genetics and infections and immunity which will inform research in this area.
[4] It is not possible to disaggregate figures for childhood leukaemia.
Notes:
The fluctuation in levels of spend reflects the cycle of commissioning as projects start and finish.

Dentists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances a dentist can enrol on a course on *(a)* peer review and *(b)* clinical audit without first being given a dental vocational training number. [58091]

Mr. Milburn: Participation in peer review and clinical audit schemes is of most benefit to principal general dental practitioners. A dentist without a vocational training certificate cannot join a peer review and clinical audit groups or receive expenses payments for attending

their meetings. However, arrangements can be made for dentists seeking to acquire a vocational training certificate to sit in as an observer on a group and attend relevant study days in the local vocational training scheme without charge.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the dates on which future waiting list numbers will be published. [58272]

Mr. Milburn: The current pattern of publication of National Health Service waiting list statistics was set out in the 31 August 1998 "Statistical Press Notice on NHS Waiting List and Activity Figures". Monthly in-patient waiting lists statistics are published during the fifth full week after the month end, unless the month coincides with a quarter end when the figures are published a week later with quarterly National Health Service activity figures. The timetable for the next three months will be as follows:

Figures relating to end of month	*Publication date*
September (plus activity for July to September quarter)	Week commencing 9 November
October	Week commencing 30 November
November	Week commencing 4 January 1999

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what day in the current month the waiting list statistics will be published. [58518]

Mr. Milburn: September in-patient waiting list statistics for the National Health Service in England were published today, 9 November 1998.

Health Authority Appeals

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the occasions when appeals against health authority proposals were upheld by his Department between 1979 and 1997; [58429]

(2) how many appeals were made to his Department following proposals put forward by each health authority between 1979 and 1997. [58430]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Primary Care Groups

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his Department's policy is on the appointment of elected councillors to primary care group boards; [58358]

(2) how many health authorities have indicated to his Department their intention to reserve places on primary care group boards for elected councillors; [58360]

(3) what guidance he has issued to health authorities on the appointment of elected councillors to primary care group boards; [58359]

(4) what guidance he has issued to local authorities regarding the nomination of elected councillors to serve on primary care group boards. [58357]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* Guidance (Local Authority Circular 1998/21) has been issued to local authorities regarding the nomination of elected councillors to serve on primary care group boards. Guidance (Health Service Circular 1998/139) has been issued to health authorities on the appointment of elected councillors to primary care group boards. The Guidance makes it clear that elected councillors may serve as lay members of Primary Care Groups. We are not aware of any health authorities indicating their intention to reserve places on primary care group boards for elected councillors.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the budget for managing primary care groups will be spent on allowances and expenses for board members. [58361]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* The management costs of health authorities and their constituent primary care groups must be contained within management cost ceilings set for each health authority.

It is for health authorities and their constituent primary care groups to agree what proportion of their management cost allocation will be available for each primary care group. The proportion of primary care group's management budget spent on board members' allowances and expenses will vary for each primary care group depending upon local circumstances, the constitution of the board and the level of delegated responsibility taken on by the primary care group.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *537–38*, concerning local authority representation on primary care group boards, for what reasons he decided not to reserve a board place for an elected member of the relevant local authority. [58802]

Mr. Milburn: Primary Care Groups are concerned with the delivery of better local health services to their patients and how such services can be effectively integrated with social services. It is therefore important that at this operational level a local social services authorities officer should be the representative on the governing board of a Primary Care Group.

Health authorities and local government authorities remain responsible for the strategic planning and delivery of these local care arrangements and it is at this level that we see local authority members as having an enhanced opportunity to influence the development and implementation of health care arrangements for their community.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *538*, concerning primary care group boards, what plans he has to issue guidance to board members in dealing with potential conflicts of interest. [58801]

Mr. Milburn: Primary Care Groups, as committees of health authorities, are governed by existing guidance on corporate governance.

Work-related Stress

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of

work-related stress in the NHS on levels of absenteeism; and what measures he is taking to reduce *(a)* work-related stress and *(b)* staff sickness. [57797]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* Research has shown that National Health Service staff suffer substantially higher levels of stress than employees in the private sector and that this contributes to 40 per cent. of all sickness absence. The NHS Executive has issued guidance to all NHS trusts and health authorities on managing stress through its Health at Work in the NHS project and is piloting work based on this guidance at four trusts. The new strategic framework for managing Human Resources in the NHS is setting targets for reductions of sickness absence rates.

Coal Burn (Pollution Effects)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the effect on rates of morbidity and mortality from cerebrovascular pulmonary and cardiac diseases of sustaining coal burn in the United Kingdom at present relative to continuing with change in the electricity generation mix towards gas-fired generation. [58707]

Ms Jowell: None. However, emissions from power stations will be taken into account as part of a review of the air quality strategy, which will be completed by the end of this year.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *416*, if he will publish the size of the waiting list at Mid Essex Hospital's NHS Trust calculated on the same basis as the figure provided in his answer. [58693]

Mr. Milburn: The total number of patients waiting at Mid Essex Hospital National Health Service Trust is 11,615 at September 1998.

Internet Publishing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to require all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by his Department to publish their working papers and minutes on the Internet. [58773]

Ms Jowell: The Department is committed to encouraging greater openness of those public bodies which it sponsors, whenever this is practical or appropriate. Any decision to publish information on any of those bodies on the Internet will be taken on a case-by-case basis, in line with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information[1].

[1] Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, Second Edition (1997), The Stationery Office Ltd.

Care Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *538*, concerning care home placements, what research he has commissioned to establish the scale of the problems. [58803]

Mr. Hutton: No research has been commissioned specifically to look at this issue. Following the passage of the Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1998 we are unaware of any major problems in this area.

Registration and Inspection

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health care establishments and services that are not covered by a regulation and inspection regime *(a)* currently and *(b)* under proposals made by his Department. [58775]

Mr. Hutton: Statistics on unregistered health care establishments are not collected centrally. Currently, independent sector hospitals, clinics and nursing homes are required to be registered under the Registered Homes Act 1984.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Partners in Europe

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the schools pack Partners in Europe; what feedback he has received from schools and pupils; how he intends to monitor the future success of the pack in schools; and if he will make a statement. [58747]

Mr. Mudie: The Partners in Europe pack for schools was distributed in January 1998 to all schools in the United Kingdom. No formal assessment of the impact of the pack has been made nor is any planned, as its use in schools is voluntary.

The Partners in Europe information and resource pack for schools was produced in response to requests from teachers to update materials that were already in use in the classroom. The pack takes account of existing work in schools. It was produced in conjunction with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges.

New Deal (Substitution)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the Government's evaluation of the New Deal for Young People will take into account the effects of substitution, dead-weight and displacement. [58876]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Yes: we are evaluating New Deal very thoroughly: that evaluation will take account of substitution, dead-weight and displacement. Details of the monitoring and evaluation of New Deal are contained in an article in the November issue of Labour Market Trends which has been placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pension Incomes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *547–48*, on pension incomes, if

he will provide corresponding figures based on income excluding income from capital; and if he will provide a more detailed breakdown of the results for those below £70 per week. [58881]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table.

Pensioner benefit units disqualified from the proposed minimum income guarantee because of excess capital but who have incomes below Income Support levels, excluding income from capital, by band of income

Income	*Pensioners*
Up to £49.99	[3]50,000
£50 to £59.99	150,000
£60 to £69.99	220,000
£70 and over	180,000
Total	600,000

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey and are almost certainly subject to a degree of error; the true figures could be higher or lower than those given.
2. This estimate should be treated with some caution as it is based on small sample sizes.
3. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 cases.
4. Sample sizes are too small to give a breakdown below £49.99.
5. The estimates of income used here exclude income from savings and 'tariff income'. They also exclude any pensioners in full time work.
6. A pensioner, for income support purposes, is a single person aged 60 or over, or a couple (married or living as married) where at least one of them is aged 60 or over.
7. Of the total of 600,000, around 55 per cent. (340,000) have savings of over £20,000 and of these, approximately 190,000 have savings of more than £50,000.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the level of an adequate retirement income for the purposes of the stakeholders pension. [58828]

Mr. Denham: It is for individuals to decide for themselves what would be an adequate retirement income.

At present many people who cannot join an occupational pension scheme also find personal pensions are too expensive or give poor value for money. The Government will set out their proposals in the Green Paper.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Government plans to introduce legislation for the implementation of the stakeholder pension. [58827]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to creating a framework for stakeholder pension schemes and will bring forward any necessary legislation at the appropriate time. Our proposals will be set out in the Pensions Green Paper.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his oral statement of 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns 339–42, if he will list the estimated public expenditure effects of each of his proposed reforms to disability benefits in each of the next five years, and for each the eventual effect once the measures are fully implemented. [58597]

Mr. Timms: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated public expenditure effects of each of the proposed reforms over this period and in the long term

£ million

Measure	*1999–2000 and 2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Long term*
Reform of Incapacity Benefit	0	–90	–155	–205	–650 –700
Reform of Severe Disablement Allowance	0	–10	–20	–35	–100 –150
Disability Income Guarantee	0	+60	+65	+70	+70
Disability Living Allowance: higher rate mobility component for 3 and 4 year olds	0	+15	+15	+15	+15

Notes:

1. There are no effects in the first two years because the measures are not planned for implementation before 2001.
2. There will also be administration costs arising from the implementation of these changes, the reform of the All Work Test, and measures to take forward a more active modern service for claimants of Incapacity Benefit, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expect the final investigations under the Benefit Integrity Project to commence. [58972]

Mr. Timms: In his statement of 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns 339–55, and the exchanges which followed discussing the next phase of the Government's plans to reform the welfare state, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that we will introduce a modern, active approach to Disability Living Allowance which puts greater emphasis on getting claims right first time and which allows for regular reviews of claims in payment. He also emphasised that there would be no return to the situation that existed before April 1997, when nothing was being done to check that people were getting the right benefit.

The Benefit Integrity Project will be replaced by a new system which we will ensure is fair as well as sensitive. The characteristics of the new system and when and how it will be introduced will be the subject of future

discussions with the Disability Benefit Forum. We are keen to introduce this change as soon as possible but it is most important that we get it right.

War Disablement Pensions

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* civilian internees and *(b)* former prisoners of war are in receipt of a war disablement pension relating to the Second World War. [58475]

Mr. Timms: At 31 October 1998 there were 254,209 War Disablement Pensions in payment. Statistics on the number of former civilian internees and prisoners of war receiving payment are not kept and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Security Expenditure

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total level of expenditure or planned expenditure *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms and *(c)* as a share of GDP on (i) social security benefits excluding family credit and disability working allowance, (ii) family credit, (iii) disability working allowance, (iv) the working families tax credit, including tax expenditure and (v) the disabled persons tax credit, including tax expenditures in each year from 1978–79 to the end of the planning period. [57148]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 October 1998]:* The information is not available in the format requested. I have set out in the tables the information held by the Department.

Social Security Benefits Expenditure 1978–79 to 2001–02

	1978–79	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
(Cash) £ million							
FIS/Family Credit	24	425	494	626	929	1,208	1,441
Disability Working Allowance	—	—	—	—	3	7	11
WFTC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DPTC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Benefit Expenditure less DWA/FC/WFTC/DPTC	15,681	49,167	52,832	61,614	69,839	76,292	78,439
(Real terms—1997 to 1998 prices) £ million							
FIS/Family Credit	75	570	614	733	—	—	1,568
Disability Working Allowance	—	—	—	—	3	8	12
WFTC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DPTC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Benefit Expenditure less DWA/FC/WFTC/DPTC	49,176	65,860	65,655	72,114	79,135	84,210	85,342
(As % of GDP) Percentage							
FIS/Family Credit	0.01	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.15	0.19	0.21
Disability Working Allowance	—	—	—	—	0.00	0.00	0.00
WFTC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DPTC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Benefit Expenditure less DWA/FC/WFTC/DPTC as % of	9.1	9.4	9.4	10.4	11.4	11.8	11.4

Social Security Benefits Expenditure 1995–96 to 2001–02

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
(Cash) £ million							
FIS/Family Credit	1,739	2,084	2,326	2,498	1,933	—	—
Disability Working Allowance	19	34	42	51	45	—	—
WFTC	—	—	—	—	991	4,042	4,446
DPTC	—	—	—	—	27	100	116
Total Benefit Expenditure less DWA/FC/WFTC/DPTC	81,547	84,702	85,686	88,218	93,512	97,174	102,274
(Real terms—1997 to 1998 prices) £ million							
FIS/Family Credit	1,840	2,138	2,326	2,429	1,832	—	—
Disability Working Allowance	20	35	42	49	43	—	—
WFTC	—	—	—	—	939	3,738	4,011
DPTC	—	—	—	—	26	92	104
Total Benefit Expenditure less DWA/FC/WFTC/DPTC	86,259	86,902	85,686	85,778	88,644	89,868	92,278
(As % of GDP) Percentage							
FIS/Family Credit	0.24	0.27	0.29	0.29	0.22	—	—
Disability Working Allowance	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	—	—
WFTC	—	—	—	—	0.11	0.43	0.45
DPTC	—	—	—	—	0.00	0.01	0.01
Total Benefit Expenditure less DWA/FC/WFTC/DPTC as % of	11.3	11.1	10.5	10.3	10.6	10.5	10.4

Notes:

1. The Social Security Expenditure is purely DSS Benefit Expenditure and excludes Local Authority, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and Welsh Office on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and its predecessors. Forecasts are consistent with the Pre Budget Report.
2. Consistent data for years from 1979–80 to 1988–89 are not readily available.
3. FIS—Family Income Supplement;
WFTC—Working Family Tax Credit
DPTC—Disabled Persons Tax Credit
DWA—Disability Working Allowance
FC—Family Credit

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56825]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56823]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the Written Answers my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office gave him on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate is provided by his Department's Policy Simulation Model of the number of *(a)* adults and *(b)* children in benefit units receiving either means-tested benefits or the working families tax credit (i) in 1997–98, (ii) in 1998–99, (iii) in April 1999 after the introduction of the pensioner income guarantee, (iv) in October 1999 after the introduction of the WFTC and (v) once the changes to disability and incapacity benefits announced on 28 October have been fully implemented. [58598]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table. Benefit units may be in receipt of more than one of the benefits shown. Consequently, the sum of the totals will not represent an overall estimate for adults and children on income-related benefits.

Estimated numbers of benefit units in receipt of Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Working Families Tax Credit in October 1999 after the introduction of all proposed policy changes for 1999–2000

Thousand

Family type	*Income Support*	*Housing Benefit*	*Council Tax Benefit*	*Working Families Tax Credit*
Single (no children)	2,900	2,350	2,690	0
Couple (no children)	490	640	1,090	0
Lone Parent (1 child)	470	440	470	300
Lone Parent (2 children)	350	290	330	160
Lone Parent (3 or more children)	200	180	200	50
Couple (1 child)	130	140	160	200
Couple (2 children)	130	130	140	290
Couple (3 or more children)	180	130	150	210
Total benefit units with at least 1 person receiving benefit	4,850	4,320	5,230	1,200
Total number of adults in benefit units where at least 1 person receiving benefit	5,770	5,360	6,760	1,890
Total number of children in benefit units where at least 1 person receiving benefit	2,900	2,550	2,790	2,290

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1999–2000 prices, benefit levels and caseloads.
2. Total caseloads of numbers in receipt of benefits are consistent with the Department's 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review forecasts.
3. As estimates are based on survey data and then calibrated to forecasts based mainly on administrative data, the totals shown for each family type may differ from the true total.
4. The total number of adults represents those aged 16 and over, except for those 16 to 18 year olds in full time education. The total number of children represents those aged under 16 or 16 to 18 year olds in full time education.

Internet Publishing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to require all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by his Department to publish their working papers and minutes on the Internet. [58772]

Mr. Timms: Working papers and minutes of task forces sponsored by this Department are internal policy documents and as such we have no plans to request their publication. When reports or documents are subsequently published or made available by conventional means, publication via the Internet is automatically considered.

Single Gateway

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what funding has been allocated for nationwide implementation of the single gateway following the completion of the pilot scheme. [58986]

Angela Eagle: We will use the single gateway pilots to find out what the costs are of operating such a service. We will then consider national implementation in light of these findings.

Pensions (Age Additions)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *547*, and of 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *603*, on age additions, for what reason the means-tested benefit offset resulting from a £5 age addition is estimated to be lower in 1999–2000 than it would have been in 1997–98. [58767]

Mr. Denham: The answers were based on different models (a full suite of models for 1999–2000 is not yet available) and calibrated to different forecasts. Both answers provided the best estimate available at the time.

Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes there have been in the speed with which settlements of personal injury cases are made since the passage of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997. [58410]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the working of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997. [58413]

Mr. Timms: Since the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act came into force on 6 October 1998, we have received a total of 168 representations about the working of the scheme. The majority concern individuals making representations about the way the scheme has affected their compensation payment.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been awarded incapacity benefit in each year since April 1995 in (i) Staffordshire and (ii) the West Midlands. [58275]

Mr. Timms: The administration of Incapacity Benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 5 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for the number of people in the Staffordshire and West Midlands areas who have applied for, and been awarded, Incapacity Benefit (IB) in each year since April 1995.

Information on the number of IB claims received is only available by each of the Agency's district, which do not match county boundaries. To obtain this information in the format requested would involve disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of awards of IB broken down by geographical areas has only been available since November 1996. Information from that date is shown in the attached table.

I hope the information is helpful.

Incapacity benefit awards

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
West Midlands	24,516	36,945	5,053
Staffordshire	9,091	15,809	2,318

Notes:
Figures provided by Analytical Services Division.
Figures are provisional and subject to change.

TREASURY

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997; [56756]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown in numerical and percentage terms of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office as at 1 October 1997. [56758]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given to him by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *669–70*.

Fixed-rate Preference Shares

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the repeal of section 255 of the Taxes Act 1988 on companies which have in issue fixed-rate preference shares created before 6 April 1973. [58349]

Dawn Primarolo: The effect of the repeal of section 255 of the Taxes Act 1988 was considered as part of the general assessment of the changes flowing from the Government's decision to abolish Advance Corporation Tax from 6 April 1999.

The Government took into account the cumulative effect of twenty-five years' inflation on the value of any remaining shares to which section 255 applies, and subsequent changes, including those effective from 6 April 1999, to the taxation of companies and shareholders which mean that it no longer works as intended.

Aviation Fuel

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue which would be raised if aviation fuel sold in the UK were subject to VAT at *(a)* 8 per cent. and *(b)* 17.5 per cent.. [58500]

Ms Hewitt: HM Customs and Excise have no estimate.

Prudential

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Prudential over the disposal of its surplus funds; what sums are involved; and if he will make a statement. [58721]

Ms Hewitt: The Prudential announced in 1996 that it was opening discussions with DTI on the attribution of the inherited estate in its long-term business fund. These discussions are continuing with the Treasury, which took over responsibility for insurance regulation from DTI in January 1998. The total amount involved was estimated by an official of the Prudential when the company gave evidence to the Treasury Select Committee on 2 July 1998, to be between £6 billion and £8 billion.

It is the Treasury's policy not to comment publicly on discussions which it may have with companies in its regulatory capacity, in the interests of effective regulation and commercial confidentiality. But the Government's position on inherited estates was set out in a statement by the then Minister for Corporate Affairs in February 1995, and reaffirmed by the then Economic Secretary in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) on 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *750–52*. The Treasury will deal with the Prudential's proposals, and any other proposals for attribution of the inherited estates of life offices, in accordance with the principles set out in those statements. The Treasury will place particular emphasis on protecting the interests of policyholders.

Charity Taxation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current position with regard to the review of charity taxation policy; and if he will make a statement. [58543]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Financial Secretary to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *46*.

Landfill Tax (Salt Extraction Industry)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce measures to reduce the impact of the landfill tax on the salt extraction industry; and if he will make a statement. [58581]

Ms Hewitt: The landfill tax applies to disposals of waste at sites that are subject to waste management licensing. The salt extraction industry currently pays the lower rate of landfill tax on the liquid waste that it deposits in salt cavities. It pays only on the solids content of the waste. Customs carried out a review of the tax, involving other Government Departments with waste policy interests, which reported in March 1998. The review considered the case for certain exemptions from the tax, including for salt extraction industry wastes, but concluded that no further exemptions should be granted. I understand that the industry has made representations that its waste disposal operations should be exempt from waste management licensing. The provision of exemptions is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. I understand that his officials are examine the industry's case.

Tax Burden

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *331–34*, on taxation, when he intends to publish an updated version of estimates of the tax burden. [58329]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 2.8 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1998.

Withholding Tax

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to veto the EU proposal regarding the introduction of a 20 per cent. withholding tax on interest payments paid to non-UK resident recipients residing in the EU. [58792]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are in favour of effective international action against tax evasion, and we are taking an active part in discussions on the draft

Directive. We will not agree to any course of action which would seriously damage the UK and other European financial markets.

Growth Forecast

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will set out the basis for revising the growth forecast for 2001–02; [58795]

(2) if he will set out the basis for revising upwards the growth forecast for 2000–01; [58794]

(3) if he will set out the basis for forecasting growth of 2½ per cent. in 2000. [58798]

Ms Hewitt: Full details of the Treasury's new forecasts were set out in the Pre-Budget Report, published on 3 November.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the effect of his revised growth forecast on unemployment in 1999. [58796]

Ms Hewitt: The economy continues to expand and create new jobs. Employment has risen by 400,000 since the election and unemployment has fallen by 280,000. With regard to future employment prospects, the Government have been putting in place a wide range of measures to address structural problems in the labour market. The key is to ensure that people are well trained and able to adapt to the changing circumstances of a modern dynamic economy.

Resource Accounts

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the dry-run resource account for 1998–99 will be published. [58797]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's intention is to implement Resource Accounting and Budgeting fully from 2001–02. In advance of full implementation, departments are producing dry-run resource accounts over the next three years when, subject to Parliamentary approval, resource accounts will replace Appropriation Accounts.

For 1998–99, all departments will produce dry-run resource accounts which will be subject to a dry-run audit by the National Audit Office. There is no intention to publish these formally, although they may be made available to departmental Select Committees.

Subject to the result of the NAO dry-run audit, accounts directions will be issued to departments in respect of the financial year 1999–2000. Two further full sets of dry-run resource accounts will then be produced by all departments in respect of the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. These dry-run accounts will be published, along with a report by the Controller and Auditor General, following audit by the NAO.

Petrol Smuggling

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide estimates of the cost to the Exchequer in lost revenue of petrol smuggling from the continent for the last year for which figures are available. [58519]

Ms Hewitt: HM Customs and Excise have no estimates for the revenue lost to the Exchequer through this activity.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of revenue was lost in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* North West Region through petrol smuggling in the last year for which figures are available. [58520]

Ms Hewitt: HM Customs and Excise have no estimates for the revenue lost to the Exchequer through such activity in these regions.

Imported Motor Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost to the Exchequer in lost revenue from the parallel import of motor vehicles from Ireland to the UK in the last year for which figures are available. [58521]

Ms Hewitt: No figures on the revenue loss from the parallel import of motor vehicles from Ireland to the UK are available.

VAT (Hospitals)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rules governing reclamation of VAT by hospitals. [58522]

Dawn Primarolo: The business activities of hospitals are governed by the same VAT rules as those for other organisations. Private care provided by all hospitals is exempt from VAT, which means that hospitals cannot recover any VAT associated with those supplies. However, when providing free health care, the funding NHS hospitals receive from the Department of Health takes account of VAT. In addition, when NHS Trusts contract out services to the private sector, the tax they incur can in most instances be reclaimed.

Income Tax

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if all lower rate and higher rate tax payers will receive the full value of his proposed 10 pence starting rate of tax. [58600]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government will introduce a 10 pence starting rate of income tax when it is economically right to do so. The new rate will be incorporated in the income tax system in the way that best meets the Government's objectives of improving work incentives and promoting a fair and efficient tax system.

Taxation (Estimates)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of which taxes Treasury ministers receive estimates from the Inland Revenue of monthly receipts. [58601]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 6 June 1997, *Official Report*, column 277.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the current rates of vehicle excise duty, or equivalent, for (i) a 1600cc engined car, (ii) a goods vehicle with a gross or train weight of between 3,500 and 7,500 kg, (iii) a three axle tractor unit with a two or more

axle semi-trailer with a weight of 38,000 kg and (iv) a single-deck bus with capacity for 50 passengers in each of the countries of the EU. [58706]

Ms Hewitt: The current rates of UK Vehicle Excise Duty for the vehicles quoted are as follows:

(i) 1600cc car—£150 per annum.

(ii) A goods vehicle with a gross or train weight of between 3,500kgs and 7,500kgs pays £160 per annum.

(iii) A three axle tractor unit with a two or more axle semi-trailer with a weight of 38,000kgs pays £2,820 per annum.

(iv) A single deck bus with seating capacity for 50 passengers pays £320 per annum.

Vehicle Excise Duty in other member states is based on a variety of different factors such as types of fuel, power output, weight and noise. It is, thus, impossible to make direct comparisons across the EU member states.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates the yield will be in 1998–99 from (i) vehicle excise duty, (ii) fuel duty on petrol and diesel and (iii) VAT on sales of petrol and diesel. [58704]

Ms Hewitt: Table B10 of the November 1998 Pre-Budget Report forecasts that the yield in 1998–99 from vehicle excise duty will be £4.7bn and the yield from fuel duty on petrol and diesel will be £21.8bn. These figures do not include VAT receipts, which are not disaggregated to sales of petrol and diesel.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rules will govern the decision as to which employer delivers the working families tax credit where an employee works for more than one employer. [58978]

Dawn Primarolo: This is one of the issues currently under discussion between Inland Revenue officials and employer representatives and decisions will be announced in due course.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures were taken to prevent fraud from collusion between employers and employees in designing the working families tax credit. [58977]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government recognise that most employers carry out their obligations honestly and properly. Working Families Tax Credit will build on Family Credit, but it will be administered by the Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue has considerable experience of checking the operation of PAYE. It will use its expertise to detect and prevent collusive fraud in Working Families Tax Credit.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect the operation of the working families tax credit will have on the cashflow of small businesses with low-paid employees. [58974]

Dawn Primarolo: Inland Revenue officials have been consulting employer representatives, including representatives of small businesses. The effect on cash flow is one of the issues they are examining.

Smaller businesses will benefit from the proposals that, while employer payments of WFTC will normally be set off against PAYE tax and NICs deducted, employers will be able to apply to the Inland Revenue for funding if they have insufficient PAYE tax and NICs out of which to pay the tax credit.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56798]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56796]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

Food Production

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent meetings he has had with the supermarket industry to discuss its influence on the food production policies of farmers; and if he will make a statement. [57304]

Mr. Rooker: Our right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food met representatives of the British Retail Consortium on 3 November. I was present, as was our noble Friend Lord Donoughue.

Meat Inspection Charges

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which other EU countries meat inspection charges are levied on the industry; and at what rate. [57724]

Mr. Rooker: Council Directive 85/73/EEC (as amended) on the financing of veterinary inspections and controls requires Member States to recover the costs of those hygiene inspections conducted at licensed fresh meat premises in accordance with harmonised EC meat hygiene rules. The Directive sets minimum standard charges (in ECU) applicable in all Member States for hygiene inspections of red meat, poultry meat and game meat dependent on the species and size of animals being slaughtered. Subject to meeting specified criteria such as the efficiency of operations at individual plants, the Directive provides for the standard charge to be abated by up to 55 per cent. Conversely, where the actual cost of inspection exceeds the standard charge, the Directive provides for actual costs to be charged. Similar principles apply in respect of charges for cutting plants.

The actual level of hygiene inspection charges levied on individual meat plants is set by the competent authority in each Member State within the framework laid down by the Directive. Information about the level of such charges in other Member States is not yet available. I am seeking such information and will write to the hon. Member, although this may take some time.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to require manufacturers to inform consumers when the content of food has been genetically modified. [57953]

Mr. Rooker: It is already a requirement of the EC Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients Regulation (258/97) and EC Regulation 1139/98 concerning the compulsory labelling of foodstuffs produced from genetically modified soya and maize that foods are clearly labelled to show when they contain genetically modified materials.

Maladministration Compensation

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that his Department's response to the instructions in the report of 28 August 1998 by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration with regard to compensation for Mr. D. J. Kennard conforms to Government Accounting Standards 3/97 amendment 7, chapter 36.3. [57970]

Mr. Rooker: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has already paid to Mr. and Mrs. D. J. Kennard the compensation recommended by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (in his report of 28 August 1998) relating to delays in the administration of the 1993 sheep quota national reserve. The payment was consistent with Treasury Guidance on financial redress.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy for compensating people whom the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration concludes have suffered an injustice as a result of maladministration by his Department. [57973]

Mr. Rooker: Where the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration concludes that an individual has suffered an injustice as a result of maladministration by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Ministry normally accepts and implements any recommendations for redress made by the Ombudsman, having regard to central financial guidance.

Horses (Strangles)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what investigations his Department has carried out into the recent trend in the number of cases of strangles in UK-based horses; and if he will make strangles a notifiable disease. [57874]

Mr. Rooker: I am aware that the horse industry is concerned over the prevalence of strangles reported in horses in the UK and elsewhere. However, this is a matter for the industry which is best placed to control it, and Codes of Practice published by the Horserace Betting Levy Board already incorporate guidelines on strangles. I have no plans to make strangles a notifiable disease.

Honey Bees

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the danger to the native honey bee arising from imported honey bees; and if he will make it his policy to ban the importation of honey bees. [58221]

Mr. Rooker: Imports of honey bees are currently allowed from other Member States provided they are accompanied by a health certificate. Imports of Queen bees with attendant workers are also permitted from Australia, Fiji, Hawaii, and New Zealand under licence and with a health certificate.

I have no evidence that such legal importation of honey bees poses any threat and therefore have no grounds upon which to base a ban. Our technical advisers at the National Bee Unit are currently undertaking a risk assessment to help us determine whether we should also allow imports of bee packages from New Zealand. No decisions will be taken until we have that assessment.

Livestock Producers

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance his Department is currently giving to livestock producers; and if he will make a statement. [58274]

Mr. Rooker: Government action to assist livestock producers is constrained by the rules of the CAP. Nevertheless, we have successfully lobbied the Commission to grant Private Storage Aid in the UK in both the pigmeat and sheepmeat sectors. In addition, following representation from the UK and others, the Commission agreed on two occasions, most recently on 15 October, to increase payments of export refunds on pigmeat.

With regard to the beef sector, we have agreed with other Member States that advance payments under the 1998 Beef Special Premium and Suckler Cow Premium Schemes will be increased from 60 per cent. to 80 per cent. This means bringing forward some £100 million of payments to the industry which would otherwise not have been available until the spring of next year.

Chernobyl

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the estimated cost to his Department of the payment of grants to farmers who were unable to move cattle as a result of the radioactive fall-out from the Chernobyl accident. [58658]

Mr. Rooker: The only Food Protection Orders which came into force as a result of the Chernobyl accident concerned the movement, sale and slaughter of sheep. There were no Food Protection Orders on the movement of cattle. Therefore no payments of grants to cattle farmers were necessary.

Imported Meat

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans the Government have to enforce United Kingdom meat production standards on non-EU imported meat. [58568]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) on 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *431*.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what recommendations have been made to his Department by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee following the finding of abnormal prion protein in the appendix of a patient in Torbay; what steps he has taken to implement the recommendations; and if he will make a statement; [57202]

(2) what meetings his Department has had, with which bodies, following the finding of abnormal prion protein in the appendix of a patient in Torbay; and if he will make a statement. [57128]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *532–36*.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what meetings his Department has had with representatives of *(a)* the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee and *(b)* the Central Veterinary Laboratory following the finding of abnormal prion protein in the appendix of a patient in Torbay; and if he will make a statement. [57201]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *532–36*. A member of the staff of the Central Veterinary Laboratory is a technical adviser at SEAC meetings.

Beef Ban

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he estimates the European Union beef ban will be lifted. [56458]

Mr. Rooker: The European Commission's proposal for a Date-based Export Scheme (DBES) is currently being considered by the Standing Veterinary Committee. The DBES would permit the resumption of exports of deboned beef from UK cattle born after 1 August 1996. We wish the ban to be lifted as quickly as possible and hope the scheme will be adopted by the end of the year. The export of deboned beef from certified herds in Northern Ireland has been permitted since 1 June.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 10 November 1998

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will make a statement on the use of bronze in the New Parliamentary Building. [58782]

Sir Sydney Chapman: The initial brief for the building was set out in the Second Report from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), Session 1990–91 (HC551). The Committee recommended a building of

"durable, high-quality materials which are in keeping with the area and will weather well".

In his subsequent report to the House, the architect, Sir Michael Hopkins, advised that the materials which had been selected were consistent with the requirements of a high-quality building with a minimum life span of 120 years. The major components of the building, including the main structural elements, would be designed to last for the life of the building.

Aluminium bronze was selected for the roof for both its durability and good structural properties. The use of bronze has been continued down the elevations as a facing for the duct panels and the frames to the windows.

The first of the fenestration and duct units will be installed before Christmas with work on the roof starting early in the New Year. Hon. Members will have then the opportunity to see the contribution the use of bronze has made to the high quality of the design of the building as well as to achieving the functional requirements.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Council if she has completed an audit of the state of readiness for millennium compliance in the public sector. [59268]

Mrs. Beckett: My right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) first reported to the House on the progress that was being made by central government departments and agencies in achieving millennium compliance on 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 1104–05. Arrangements were then put in place to monitor progress on a quarterly basis. Three subsequent statements on progress across central government have since been made. The results of the last review, which I published on 9 September, showed that good progress is being made by departments and agencies in tackling the millennium bug. Work on correcting priority, business-critical, systems is particularly well advanced.

The Government also reported on progress across the wider public sector in their statement in the House on 8 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 716–18. More detailed information on key parts of the wider public sector was then made available in the September statement.

It is intended to issue the next statement on progress in tackling the bug shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish the names of those people she has appointed to public bodies since 1 May 1997, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [56762]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have placed in the Library a list of those individuals who have been appointed to public bodies in Northern Ireland in the period 6 December 1997 to 23 October 1998, with details of their position and whether they receive remuneration. Details for the period 1 May to 5 December 1997 were given in my answer of 15 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *40*.

Assaults (Direct Action Against Drugs)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many serious violent assaults in Northern Ireland since 11 April *(a)* have been admitted by and *(b)* are believed to have involved Direct Action Against Drugs. [58205]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Lone Parent Benefit

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for *(a)* lone parent benefit and *(b)* child benefit were made from (i) 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998 and (ii) 1 April 1998 to 30 September 1998; of these how many have been approved; how many were refused; and how many await determination. [58666]

Mr. McFall: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Thompson, and I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Chris Thompson to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 10 November 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of applications for lone parent benefit and Child Benefit.

The number of claims for Child Benefit for the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998 was 32,817 and for the period 1 April 1998 to 30 September 1998 was 15,744.

During the period 1 April 1997 to 30 September 1998 46,530 claims were approved and 366 claims were refused. At 30 September 1998 there were 1,665 awaiting determination.

There is no separate benefit for lone parents only a higher rate of Child Benefit. It is therefore not possible to give separate figures for lone parents.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for renewal books were made in respect of *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* lone parent benefits from (i) 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998 and (ii) 1 April 1998 to 30 September 1998; how long it took on average to process such applications; and how many applications are still outstanding. [58665]

Mr. McFall: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Thompson, and I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Chris Thompson to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 10 November 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of applications for renewal order books for Child Benefit and lone parent benefit.

All renewal order books for Child Benefit are automatically issued to the customer so there is no need for an application to be made. Order books are normally issued to the post office 4 weeks before a customer's current order book is due to expire. Accordingly there is no information regarding the length of time it takes to process a renewal or how many renewals are outstanding.

The number of Child Benefit renewal order books issued for the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998 was 387,636 and for the period 1 April 1998 to 30 September 1998 was 232,051.

There is no separate benefit for lone parents only a higher rate of Child Benefit. It is therefore not possible to give separate figures for lone parents.

You will know that Child Benefit Office has experienced some problems following the introduction of a new computer system. This has undoubtedly had some impact on the issue of renewal order books but no separate figures have been kept. I am pleased to say we are over the worst of our difficulty.

Paramilitary Attacks

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for each week in October the number of *(a)* punishment beatings and *(b)* punishment shootings which took place in Northern Ireland indicating how many were in each category committed by (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [59231]

Mr. Ingram: The number of paramilitary style attacks for each week in October is shown in the table:

	Paramilitary assaults		*Paramilitary shootings*	
Period	*Attributed to Loyalists*	*Attributed to Republicans*	*Attributed to Loyalists*	*Attributed to Republicans*
1–4 October	3	0	0	0
5–11 October	2	2	0	0
12–18 October	2	0	0	0
19–25 October	1	0	0	1
26–31 October	0	2	0	0
Totals	8	4	0	1

Note:
These figures are subject to minor amendment in the light of further information becoming available. The figures refer to casualties as distinct from incidents.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the week ended Saturday 7 November the number of *(a)* punishment beatings and *(b)* punishment shootings which took place in Northern Ireland; and if she will indicate how many in each category were committed by (i) Loyalists and (ii) Republicans. [59244]

Mr. Ingram: The number of paramilitary style attacks during the period 1–7 November 1998 are shown in the table:

	Paramilitary assaults	*Paramilitary shootings*
Attributed to Loyalists	1	2
Attributed to Republicans	1	1

Note:
These figures are subject to minor amendment in the light of further information becoming available. The figures refer to casualties as distinct from incidents.

Autism

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will introduce a charter for persons with autism in line with the charter adopted at the fourth Autism European Congress in May 1992; and if she will make a statement. [57627]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary at the Office of Public Service on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *558–59*.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Do-It-Yourself Shared Ownership Scheme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many beneficiaries of the Do-It-Yourself Shared Ownership Scheme there were *(a)* in total and *(b)* newly approved in the last full year for which data are available for (i) the UK, (ii) London and (iii) the London Borough of Richmond. [58589]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department is responsible for housing matters in England and the following figures therefore refer to England rather than the UK as a whole.

(a) between its start in 1991–92 and 1997–98, the Do-It-Yourself Shared Ownership Scheme has assisted a total of 23,306 households in England; of which 5,659 were in London and 72 in the London Borough of Richmond.

(b) in 1997–98, a total of 2,238 households were assisted in England; of which 619 were in London and 10 in the London Borough of Richmond.

Heathrow Airport

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what risk assessment has been made of the simultaneous use of the Kew and St. Margaret's western approaches at Heathrow. [58501]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The KEW and St. Margaret's western approaches are used simultaneously only rarely when the scheduled demand of aircraft waiting to land at Heathrow exceeds the capacity of the designated landing runway. This procedure conforms with the International

Civil Aviation Organisation's standard operating procedures and requires the maintenance of standard separation criteria between landing traffic. It does not, therefore, require special risk assessment.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to ensure that no area is disproportionately affected by overflying aircraft landing at Heathrow. [58496]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Landing aircraft need to make their final approach aligned with the runway, which limits the scope for varying their final approach track. The Aircraft Noise Monitoring Advisory Committee (ANMAC), which advises the DETR on aircraft noise at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, is currently investigating the feasibility of setting noise limits for arriving aircraft and other possible means of ameliorating arrivals noise. ANMAC has also established a working group which is looking at the causes of variability in the noise levels of landing aircraft.

In the second stage consultation paper on night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, to be issued shortly, we will be inviting views on various options for changes to the preferential use of Heathrow's runways at night.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of the safety impact of recent steps to reduce horizontal distances between planes on landing at Heathrow. [58494]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Safety concerns are paramount to both the Government and to our aviation safety advisers, the Safety Regulation Group (SRG) of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). SRG approved stringent procedures for using reduced horizontal spacing for arriving aircraft at Heathrow in January 1998 after exhaustive trials had confirmed that safety was in no way compromised. Reduced separation can be implemented only in daylight hours; for certain types of aircraft; when there is an arrivals backlog; and is subject to prevailing weather conditions. SRG will continue to monitor the use of these procedures to ensure that the safe operation of the airport is maintained.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will establish an independent monitoring body to measure aircraft noise at Heathrow. [58497]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have no plans to do so. Aircraft noise is already measured satisfactorily by Heathrow Airport Limited to check compliance with the take-off noise limits set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to detect infringements. The integrated aircraft noise and track-keeping (NTK) system installed by BAA plc. in 1993 is used for this purpose. Data from the system are also used by the Department of Operational Research and Analysis of the CAA/NATS in producing the annual historical aircraft noise exposure contours published by the DETR, and for study purposes.

Aircraft noise around Heathrow is monitored by the Heathrow Airport Consultative Committee (HACC) and has been the subject of technical studies by DORA on behalf of the Aircraft Noise Monitoring Advisory Committee (ANMAC), which advises my Department. Both include representatives of local government, local interest groups and the aviation industry.

Bus Services

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under what statutory provisions traffic commissioners allow small public service vehicle operators to run unregistered bus services. [58724]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The bus services which have to be registered with the traffic commissioner are 'local services', as defined in section 2 of the Transport Act 1985. Broadly speaking, local services are those using public service vehicles for the carriage of passengers at separate fares, with stopping places less than fifteen miles apart, and which are not trips organised privately by persons acting independently of vehicle operators etc. (as set out in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981), or services operated under a permit under section 19 of the Act. The requirement to register services is imposed by section 6 of the 1985 Act, which applies irrespective of the size of the public service vehicle concerned.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will issue guidance to regional development agencies on their sustainable development role and responsibilities in respect to rural areas; [58729]

(2) if regional development agencies will be given guidance on their sustainable development obligations and responsibilities for rural areas before they prepare their regional strategies. [58659]

Mr. Meale: Yes. We published draft guidance to RDAs on their regional strategies on 20 October, and have invited comments by the end of November. Work is in progress on supplementary guidance to RDAs on how they should contribute to sustainable development and on rural policy, on which we will consult interested parties in due course. The aim is to finalise all these documents early in the New Year. RDAs will be fully operational from April 1999, and we envisage that they will produce their regional strategies by October 1999.

Teesside Development Corporation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *454–45*, if he will list the companies which submitted bids for disposal of *(a)* computers, *(b)* CD-Roms, *(c)* office equipment and *(d)* boardroom furniture, indicating which bids were accepted for each of the above categories of equipment after the demise of Teesside Development Corporation. [58675]

Mr. Meale: I understand that a large number of firms were approached in connection with the disposal of TDC's furniture and equipment. Three expressed interest and two definite bids were subsequently received, the higher of which was accepted. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the names of these firms cannot be divulged.

I further understand that, in subsequent negotiations, it was agreed that the bulk of TDC's computers would also be sold to this firm. The remainder of the computers and some other furniture were made available to the remaining staff of the Corporation for sums which exceeded the relevant "benchmark" figures submitted by an office equipment company.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *454*, if he will list those individuals who have kept a record of information which was previously stored on *(a)* CD-Roms or disks and *(b)* on paper after the demise of Teesside Development Corporation. [58779]

Mr. Meale: I understand that, upon its dissolution at the end of June 1998, the TDC bequeathed some 600 boxes of files to the Commission for the New Towns, as the residuary body. The CNT is currently working on cataloguing the information in these boxes before putting them away for long-term storage.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list by local authority the level of charges set for registration of houses in multiple occupation. [58583]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities are required to charge a reasonable fee which does not exceed the maximum specified by the Secretary of State. This maximum is £80 per property under a notification registration scheme, and £60 per habitable room under a registration scheme with control provisions. Information on the levels set by authorities who have introduced schemes is not held centrally.

Integrated Transport Policy

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on how his integrated transport policy will apply to rural areas. [58478]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The measures in the Government's White Paper will produce a transport system which increases choice for all—including those who live in rural areas. There are specific measures targeted at rural areas; the White Paper announced the creation of a new Rural Transport Partnership fund to help get extra resources into rural transport where it counts. In addition, the Chancellor announced on 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 1109, an additional £50 million a year to improve the public transport alternative in rural areas.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what acreage of land in England is registered as *(a)* areas of outstanding natural beauty and *(b)* sites of special scientific interest. [58814]

Mr. Meale: The total area of land in England within designated areas of outstanding natural beauty is 5,039,360 acres; sites of special scientific interest extend to 2,440,318 acres. About one third of the area of sites of special scientific interest is within areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Flood Damage (Shrewsbury)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources he will make available to Shrewsbury to deal with recent flood damage. [59153]

Ms Armstrong: Local authorities affected by an emergency or disaster, such as severe flooding, can apply to my Department for special financial assistance under the Section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (the 'Bellwin scheme'). The scheme is intended to help local authorities deal with the immediate aftermath of such an event in their area or among their inhabitants. Grant is discretionary and is normally paid on qualifying expenditure at 85 per cent. above a threshold. The threshold is related to an authority's Standard Spending Assessment.

Supermarket Developments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what meetings he has held in the last six months with representatives from supermarkets. [58883]

Mr. Prescott: In the last six months, I have met representatives of many organisations, including supermarkets, who have interests in the subject areas for which I am responsible and the many consultation documents my Department has issued.

Connex South Central

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to meet the management of Connex South Central to discuss its performance and services. [59228]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Ministers will be meeting representatives from all of the train operating companies and Railtrack on November 26, to discuss future railways policy and in particular ways of improving poor performance generally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *574*, concerning rolling stock replacement, when he expects the Franchise Director to conclude his exploration of options with Connex South Central. [59227]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that the position reached in the Franchising Director's exploratory discussions with Connex South Central is that the Company is now considering how it wishes to proceed. The Franchising Director will examine and respond to any further approach from the Company. There are no time limits on this process of dialogue.

Buses and Coaches (Speedometers)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under the public

service vehicle regulations, how often the speedometers of *(a)* fare stage buses and *(b)* coaches must be recalibrated; and if he will make a statement. [58755]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There is no legal requirement for the speedometers in either fare stage buses or coaches to be recalibrated. The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 require that speedometers must be maintained in a good working order. If the vehicle is fitted with a speedometer in accordance with either EC Directive 75/443EEC or UN ECE Regulation 39, then the accuracy requirements are that the speed indicated by the speedometer must never be less than the true speed at which the vehicle is travelling.

BEST Trustees

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if negotiations between the Government's lawyers and the BEST trustees have begun; what outstanding issues remain; and when he expects a final settlement to be reached. [59157]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Discussions with the lawyers for the National Bus Company pension trustees have begun. They were started immediately after the announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister on 30 September of the intention to achieve a just out-of-court settlement of the trustees' claim for return of the pension surplus paid over following NBC's privatisation.

High priority is being given to achieving as soon as possible a conclusion to these discussions which is satisfactory for all concerned.

Motor Coaches (Vehicle Condition Check-ups)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the number of motor coaches stopped by the police forces during the month of September for a vehicle condition check-up, how many *(a)* were found to have faults and *(b)* were refused permission to complete their journey, pending repairs to their vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [58298]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Figures for the numbers of motor coaches stopped by police officers during September are not available centrally, but I can report the coach checks recorded by the Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) in that period. Police officers exercise their power to stop moving traffic to enable VI to examine vehicles during multi-agency checks, and the VI also examines coaches whilst they are parked to minimise traffic disruption. In the latter cases, police officers would not be involved.

Checks on coaches by Vehicle Inspectorate examiners during September 1998

	Number
Full roadside checks by VI examiners	1,328
Prohibition notices issued	164 (of which 76 had immediate effect, preventing coaches from continuing their journeys)

Checks on coaches by Vehicle Inspectorate examiners during September 1998

	Number
Roadside emissions checks by VI examiners	659
Prohibition notices issued	19 (of which one had immediate effect)

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firefighters

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to legalise the payment of compensation by fire authorities to firefighters who are permanently incapacitated or to dependants of firefighters killed on duty. [58590]

Mr. George Howarth: I have been asked by the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades to give statutory authority for compensation payments, originally set out in the Council's Scheme of Conditions of Service for members of fire brigades. I am considering how this can be done.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the imposition of an administration fee in addition to the fine imposed upon drivers for exceeding the speed limit in cases detected by speed cameras. [58688]

Mr. Boateng: The Home Office has received representations from the Association of Chief Police Officers' Traffic Committee that an administrative charge should be added to fixed penalties for speeding offences detected by cameras. In addition, we have received a large volume of correspondence about increasing the funds for speed cameras by hypothecating the fine income from them.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to introduce an administration fee payable by drivers who have been detected speeding by speed cameras in addition to any other penalty they may face. [58689]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are currently reviewing the funding arrangements for speed cameras to see what more might be done. The suggestion that an administrative charge be introduced is one of a number of options which are being considered.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the future licensing of the use of animals in skin corrosivity and phototoxicity tests, under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [58667]

Mr. George Howarth: On receipt of the statement on the scientific validation of the 3T3 NRU PT test from the European Commission in November 1997, the Chief Inspector advised that in vivo tests of phototoxicity will no longer be authorised in research applications in the

United Kingdom and will not be permissible in safety testing unless the regulatory requirement can be demonstrated. This advice was updated when validation of the alternative test was extended to UV filter chemicals in May 1998.

Similarly, the TER and EPISKIN in vitro skin corrosivity tests were substituted as soon as the statement of scientific validation was received in April 1998. In vivo skin corrosivity tests are now not authorised in relevant research work and will be permitted in regulatory safety testing only while regulators demand in vivo data. This advice was conveyed to Certificate holders in a newsletter on 29 June 1998.

The Home Office policy in actively taking up validated alternative tests was discussed when my noble Friend the Minister of State visited the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods in May 1998.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the figures in Home Office Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals in Great Britain, Table 2, column 2, include animals imported from sources outside the EU to United Kingdom suppliers and then sold to designated establishments. [58668]

Mr. George Howarth: Animals used in scientific procedures which are listed in Schedule 2 to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and must therefore be obtained from designated supplying establishments in the UK, are accounted for in column 2 of table 2. This is the case, even if the animals were obtained by those supplying establishments from other countries, either inside or outside the European Union.

"Election Expenses"

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates following the *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* 1992 General Elections the Home Office published "Election Expenses"; and when he expects the volume for the 1997 General Election to be published. [58539]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office, Scottish Office and the Northern Ireland Office published the Election Expenses volume following the last four Parliamentary general elections as follows:

1979: 11 February 1980

1983: 12 December 1983

1987: 20 April 1988

1992: 15 April 1993.

It is hoped to be able to publish the volume relating to the 1997 general election before the end of the year.

Video Evidence

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government intend to implement the outstanding recommendations of the Pigot report. [58670]

Mr. Boateng: The majority of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Video Evidence, chaired by Judge Pigot, were implemented in the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Those which have not been implemented were considered by interdepartmental Working Group on Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses, the establishment of which was announced on 13 June 1997 by my right hon. Friend. The Working Group's report "Speaking up for Justice" was published on 10 June this year by my right hon. Friend for the purpose of consultation, and included recommendations to implement the outstanding recommendations of the Pigot Report. The consultation exercise has now been completed and the Government are urgently considering the responses. We are determined to improve the treatment of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, including children in the criminal justice system.

Young Offenders

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *385*, concerning children in prison, how many children aged 15 years or under *(a)* are in young offenders' centres and *(b)* in adult prisons. [59251]

Mr. George Howarth: Provisional information shows that of the 203 persons aged 15 years in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 September 1998, 162 were held in accommodation dedicated to young offenders and 41 were held in other accommodation containing adults. Young persons held in adult prisons are normally accommodated separately from adults.

Former Secretary of State for Wales

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information was passed by Home Office *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials to the Prime Minister's Office prior to 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 27 October regarding the actions of the right hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies); and if he will make a statement. [59278]

Mr. Straw: When the Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Mr. John Stevens, told me in a telephone call shortly after 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 27 October, that Mr. Davies had been involved in an incident, I passed that on in a telephone conversation to the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, Mr. Jonathan Powell. By coincidence, Mr. Stevens then came to the Home Office on other business and looked in on me. During that meeting, Mr. Stevens also spoke on the telephone to Mr. Powell. I cannot properly disclose the contents of the conversations because of the risk of prejudicing any criminal proceedings. At that stage, the police had not taken a formal statement from Mr. Davies and we were talking only about the initial information which was available and lines of inquiry which were being followed by the police.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what briefing was received by *(a)* him and *(b)* Home Office (i) Ministers and (ii) officials from the Metropolitan Police before 11.00 am on Tuesday, 27 October, regarding the actions of the right hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies); and if he will make a statement. [59279]

Mr. Straw: The first information provided to Ministers or officials at the Home Office was given by the Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Mr. John Stevens, when he spoke to me on the telephone shortly after 10.00 am on Tuesday, 27 October. By coincidence, Mr. Stevens then came to the Home Office on other

business and he looked in on me. The Permanent Secretary, Mr. David Omand, attended that meeting, which took place before 11.00 am.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Sheldon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the average costs of recruitment of policemen *(a)* in the Metropolitan area and *(b)* in the rest of England. [58838]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner tells me that the current average cost of recruiting a police officer for the Metropolitan Police Service is estimated at £780.

Information about the cost of police recruitment for the rest of England is not collected centrally and could be obtained from each police force only at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 6 October to the Under-Secretary of State regarding the right of abode of a constituent. [59063]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 9 November.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has made to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the role of the TA in contingency planning scenarios for the millennium bug; [59161]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on emergency preparedness for the millennium bug *(a)* in the UK, *(b)* in Scotland and *(c)* north of Inverness of planned reductions in the Territorial Army. [59159]

(3) what representations he has received from the Secretary of State for Scotland concerning the role of the Territorial Army in responding to civil emergencies resulting from the impact of the millennium bug on electricity supply and telecommunications; and if he will make a statement; [59158]

(4) if his contingency planning scenarios for the millennium bug include a role for the TA infantry and TA engineers. [59160]

Mr. George Howarth: Procedures are already in place for the provision of military aid to the civil authority and these arrangements are under regular review in the run up to the Millennium date change. The deployment of the Territorial Army in response to requests for aid is an operational matter for consideration within the Ministry of Defence.

Adoption

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a national register of couples wishing to adopt. [58248]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to introduce a national register of couples wishing to adopt. However, the recent Government initiative 'Quality Protects', and publication in August of the Local Authority Circular 'Adoption—Achieving the Right Balance' set out the Government's commitment to improving services for children, including adoption. Local authorities must be pro-active in avoiding undue delay in placing children for adoption and in recruiting prospective adopters able to meet the needs of children needing new and permanent families. We will monitor closely progress by local authorities on the placement of children for adoption.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sports Facilities

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many local authorities with responsibility for provision of leisure facilities have a strategic sports facilities plan; and if he will make a statement. [57892]

Mr. Banks: The English Sports Council (ESC) advises me that some 170 local authorities have such strategies currently in place, with around a further 70 in draft form.

Government and the English Sports Council (ESC) see such strategies as an important element of delivering sport at the local level. They should set the context not only for the provision of new facilities, but also for sports development and the protection of playing fields. To help assist local authorities assess their facility needs in preparing their strategies, the ESC has developed a Facilities Planning Model, and this service will be available in the Spring.

We are seeking to raise the importance of these strategies through a number of channels. Planning Policy Guidance for Sport and Recreation (PPG17) advises planning authorities which sport and recreation matters should be included within Development plans. Planning authorities are advised to consider sport and recreation strategies when they prepare those plans. This PPG is currently being updated with a revised draft for consultation around the turn of the year. In addition, as well as tying this work with the production of its Lottery Strategy, the ESC will be producing revised guidance on preparing local sport and recreation strategies early in the New Year.

Digital Terrestrial Television

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will ensure that the proceeds from auctions of analogue spectrum are used to assist all consumers and communities in the United Kingdom to receive the same quality of digital television service; [58502]

(2) when the switch-off date will be for analogue transmissions; [58503]

(3) if he will provide financial support to households that currently receive analogue terrestrial television, but which cannot receive digital terrestrial television to enable them to receive the digital television service via *(a)* digital satellite television and *(b)* otherwise. [58684]

Janet Anderson: We have not set a date for the switch-off of analogue terrestrial transmissions or yet taken a view on whether any spectrum so released should be auctioned and whether any direct Government measures should be taken to assist the migration from analogue to digital reception. These issues and others were raised in our consultation paper "Television: the Digital Future". We are currently considering the responses to that consultation exercise and an announcement on next steps will be made in due course.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate he has made of the number of households which will need to purchase new antennae in order to receive digital terrestrial television; [58720]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of households in the United Kingdom which will not be directly served by digital terrestrial television; [58733]

(3) what steps the Government intend to take to ensure that the digital terrestrial television network provides the same level of coverage as the existing analogue network; [58725]

(4) how many residents in the Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber constituency will not be directly served by digital terrestrial television; [58722]

(5) which regions will experience difficulties in being directly served by digital terrestrial television. [58723]

Janet Anderson: The launch phase of digital terrestrial television has been jointly planned by the BBC and Independent Television Commission so that the 81 transmitters used will reach around 90% of the UK population by the end of 1999 though the coverage of all six multiplexes will vary and in some cases be less. Extending digital services beyond the reach of the first 81 digital terrestrial transmitters was one of the issues raised in our consultation paper "Television: the Digital Future" the responses to which are currently being considered.

The Independent Television Commission published estimates of digital terrestrial television coverage by existing aerials in their Invitation to Apply for Multiplex Service Licences. For the first multiplex carrying the BBC's services, the ITC estimated that 81–87% of the UK population should be able to receive the service with their existing aerials.

I understand that digital terrestrial transmissions from the Rosemarkie transmitter are expected to cover the Inverness region. The BBC and ITC have jointly produced a CD-Rom containing coverage predictions for each multiplex for each transmitter site. Copies of the CD-Rom have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Civil Servants

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many civil servants are currently employed at his Department *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each policy area covered by his Department. [58859]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* There are currently a total of 362 staff within DCMS. The number of staff in each policy area (not including Central Services or senior management) is as set out.

Policy area	*Number of staff*
Arts	18
Buildings, Monuments and Sites	54
Broadcasting Policy	24
Creative Industries Unit	4
Media	14
Libraries	14
Millennium Unit	12
Museums and Galleries	25
National Lotteries	12
Regions	6
Sport and Recreation	23
Tourism	20

"Modernising Local Government"

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions have been held between his officials and the Local Government Association about the implications for *(a)* the performing arts, *(b)* the visual arts, *(c)* museums and galleries and *(d)* libraries of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' White Paper "Modernising Local Government". [58861]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Discussions with the Local Government Association about the development of cultural strategies have included discussions on the implications of the White Paper.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions regarding the White Paper "Modernising Local Government". [58964]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The subject has been discussed in correspondence and at the Central Local Partnership meeting I attended in July. Officials of both Departments are discussing how best to take forward the White Paper proposals in areas where I have an interest.

Internet Publishing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make it his policy to require all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by his Department to publish their working papers and minutes on the Internet. [58768]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* My Department encourages greater openness of the public bodies it sponsors, wherever practical and appropriate. My Department supports the proposals in "Quangos: Opening The Doors" which recommends that public bodies be encouraged to follow best practice in producing and distributing information on their role and achievement on the Internet. The extent to which the records of any specific task force or equivalent body are published or placed on the Internet will depend upon the individual circumstances and specific tasks undertaken. However, the presumption will be that the final report or recommendations will be made public unless there are good reasons to the contrary.

World Heritage Sites

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Government will announce their list of prospective world heritage sites to be put forward by the UK to UNESCO for consideration. [59019]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Together with Ministerial colleagues in the other interested Departments, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will need carefully to consider the results of the current consultation exercise before reaching a final decision on the list; but I hope that an announcement can be made within the next two or three months.

Youth Music Trust

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimates he has made of the costs of establishing the Youth Music Trust. [59234]

Mr. Chris Smith: There are various costs associated with the establishment of the Youth Music Trust, including administrative support and the cost of expert advice on the development of the Trust's underpinning policy and structure. My Department is supporting the work to establish the Trust, both financially, and in kind.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Council (Director-General)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the resignation of the Director-General of the British Council and place a copy of his resignation letter in the Library. [59274]

Mr. Fatchett: Dr. David Drewry resigned from his post as Director-General of the British Council having successfully completed a review of the Council's purpose and strategy. I understand that he saw this as an opportune time to return to his interest in academia. There is no letter of resignation: Dr. Drewry communicated his intention to resign orally in a private meeting with the Chair of the British Council, Baroness Helena Kennedy.

East Timor

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last made representations to Indonesia about East Timor. [59283]

Mr. Fatchett: I visited Jakarta on 8 October and met President Habibie and members of his Cabinet. I reinforced our commitment to the United Nation's efforts to seek a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the East Timor issue.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to *(a)* Indonesia and *(b)* Australia following the decision of the International Commission of Jurists that five Australian journalists were killed by the Indonesian Government at the time of the invasion of East Timor. [59282]

Mr. Fatchett: I raised the issue of the deaths of two British born journalists in Balibo in 1975 with President Habibie in Jakarta last month. He undertook to look into the matter. We are aware of reports in Australia of new information on the incident and welcome the Australian government's decision to refer this to Mr. Tom Sherman for his consideration.

Child Abuse

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is intending to take to reduce the incidence of child abuse in the Third World by western tourists. [59281]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The UK has adopted tough legislation to strengthen action against those who organise or participate in the sexual exploitation of children overseas. There are also extensive arrangements in place for assisting other countries in the investigation and prosecution of offences involving the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, as well as for responding to extradition requests.

Following a joint UK-Philippines initiative at the Asia-Europe Summit (ASEM), the UK hosted a conference on Child Welfare in London in October, involving government and non-government representatives from the 25 ASEM countries. The meeting focused on practical cooperation to tackle the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Pakistan

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to review the UK's policy on sanctions against Pakistan. [59277]

Mr. Fatchett: The measures which the UK and the international community took in response to nuclear tests by Pakistan and India are kept under constant review. We regularly consult our partners on the two countries' progress on nuclear non-proliferation and regional security, most recently at a meeting of the Task Force of Senior Officials held in London on 30 October.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of the imposition of sanctions on Pakistan by the USA on the prospects of Pakistan signing the Non-Proliferation Agreement. [59280]

Mr. Fatchett: We welcome the progress made by Pakistan on regional security and nuclear non-proliferation since its nuclear tests at the end of May, namely Pakistan's stated intention to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, its participation in negotiations on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and the resumption of talks with India. We attach importance to further progress, in particular the unconditional signature and ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Counter-drug Agreement

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*, when he will place in the Library a copy of the agreement by the United Kingdom and United States concerning maritime

and aerial operations in the Caribbean, signed in Washington on 13 July, together with the explanatory memorandum. [59042]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We expect to place a copy of the agreement by the United Kingdom and United States concerning maritime and aerial operations in the Caribbean in the Library of the House by the end of the year.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Teachers' Pay

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the number and percentage of classroom teachers in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools who are paid on each point of the pay spine. [57699]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The numbers and percentages of full-time classroom teachers in England and Wales at 31 March 1997[1] in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools, on each point of the pay spine, are given in the table.

[1] Provisional data. Excludes around 13,000 teachers whose pay details are not yet available.

	Maintained nursery and primary		*Maintained secondary*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Spine point 0	400	0.3	420	0.2
Spine point 0.5	30	[1]—	20	[1]—
Spine point 1	370	0.3	510	0.3
Spine point 1.5	30	[1]—	20	[1]—
Spine point 2	7,800	5.7	6,080	3.6
Spine point 2.5	140	0.1	110	0.1
Spine point 3	7,950	5.8	6,390	3.8
Spine point 3.5	180	0.1	200	0.1
Spine point 4	7,200	5.2	5,700	3.3
Spine point 4.5	250	0.2	250	0.1
Spine point 5	6,200	4.5	4,920	2.9
Spine point 5.5	220	0.2	210	0.1
Spine point 6	5,640	4.1	4,630	2.7
Spine point 6.5	220	0.2	210	0.1
Spine point 7	5,200	3.8	4,080	2.4
Spine point 7.5	220	0.2	200	0.1
Spine point 8	5,120	3.7	4,100	2.4
Spine point 8.5	320	0.2	260	0.2
Spine point 9	36,410	26.5	25,100	14.7
Spine point 9.5	1,420	1.0	930	0.5
Spine point 10	26,740	19.4	19,150	11.2
Spine point 10.5	670	0.5	670	0.4
Spine point 11	19,950	14.5	30,820	18.1
Spine point 11.5	540	0.4	1,020	0.6
Spine point 12	3,690	2.7	21,970	12.9
Spine point 12.5	110	0.1	610	0.4
Spine point 13	480	0.3	22,880	13.4
Spine point 13.5	60	[1]—	630	0.4
Spine point 14	70	0.1	7,300	4.3
Spine point 14.5	10	[1]—	160	0.1
Spine point 15	10	[1]—	550	0.3
Spine point 15.5	10	[1]—	60	[1]—
Spine point 16	10	[1]—	150	0.1
Spine point 16.5	[2]—	[1]—	30	[1]—
Spine point 17	[2]—	[1]—	60	[1]—
Total	137,640	100.0	170,350	100.0

[1] Less than 0.05 per cent.
[2] Less than 5 teachers

University Drop-outs

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students *(a)* applied for primary teaching courses, *(b)* began the courses and *(c)* subsequently failed to complete the courses, in each of the years 1992 to 1998. [56197]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following tables give information on:

(a) the number of applications to primary initial teacher training (ITT) courses, separately for undergraduate and postgraduate, for the years 1992 to 1998;

(b) the number of students entering primary ITT courses, separately for undergraduate and postgraduate, for the years 1992 to 1997; information for 1998 is not yet available;

(c) the information requested on the number of primary ITT students beginning courses each year who subsequently fail to complete the course is not available centrally.

Table 1: Applications[1] to primary ITT courses, 1992–93 to 1998–99—England and Wales

Year	*Undergraduate*[3]	*Postgraduate*
1992–93	n/a	11,910
1993–94	n/a	12,720
1994–95	n/a	10,950
1995–96	n/a	12,250
1996–97	92,290	12,580
1997–98	78,120	13,220
1998–99[2]	65,420	12,730

[1] UCAS count up to six applications per applicant, whilst GTTR count one application per applicant. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
[2] Provisional figures
[3] Comparable undergraduate information is not available prior to 1996. The figures include all courses where students may opt for a teaching certificate, and may exclude a number applying at the clearing stage.
Sources:
Undergraduate applications—Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
Postgraduate applications—Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR)

Table 2: Intake to primary ITT courses[1], 1992–93 to 1997–98—England and Wales

Year	*Undergraduate*	*Postgraduate*	*Total*
1992–93	12,109	6,255	18,364
1993–94	11,268	6,218	17,486
1994–95	9,447	5,640	15,087
1995–96	9,236	5,696	14,932
1996–97	8,363	5,454	13,817
1997–98	7,803	5,217	13,020

[1] Includes SCITT
Sources:
England—DFE Annual Recruitment Survey 1992–93 to 1993–94; HESES 1994–95;
TTA Survey of ITT Providers 1995–96 to 1997–98
Wales—DFE Annual Recruitment Survey 1992–93 to 1993–94; Welsh Office 1994–95; HESES 1995–96 to 1997–98

New Deal (Construction)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places have been filled on the New Deal for Construction programme for the latest available date. [57556]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* A total figure for New Deal clients moving into jobs in construction is not yet available, because an analysis of those starting unsubsidised jobs by industrial

sector is not yet available; however, the number who had started subsidised jobs in construction was, by the end of August 1998, 750.

The construction industry has a relatively good vacancy to placing ratio, which suggests that young people are finding construction jobs attractive and have the skills and qualities required by the industry.

We are grateful for the positive contribution the construction industry is making to the New Deal.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what target the Government have announced for the number of places to be taken up on the New Deal for Construction programme from the date of its launch to 31 December. [57557]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* The Government have announced no target but, when the Construction Industry New Deal framework was launched in February 1998, the industry expected to offer opportunities to around 3,000 young people each year.

New Junior Schools

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many new junior schools, in which local authority areas, have been *(a)* started and *(b)* completed in each of the last five years. [58285]

Ms Estelle Morris: No statutory proposals to establish new junior schools have been approved in the last three years. Accurate information for earlier years is not available.

Full-time Students

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many 11 to 18 year olds were in full-time state education in *(a)* 1998 or the latest available date, *(b)* 1988, *(c)* 1978 and *(d)* 1968. [58346]

Ms Estelle Morris: The number of full-time 11 to 18 year old pupils in maintained schools is shown in the table.

Figures as at January of each year

Year	*Pupils*
1968[1]	2,897,922
1978	4,108,619
1988	3,084,372
1998[2]	3,074,899

[1] Maintained primary and secondary schools only
[2] Includes Pupil Referral Units but excludes sixth form colleges

School Budgets

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the lowest and *(b)* the highest sum of money allocated per state (i) primary and (ii) other school pupil in full-time education in 1997–98. [58290]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table sets out the education standard spending assessment per primary pupil and per secondary pupil for all local education authorities in England for 1997–98. The lowest sum of money allocated per primary pupil and per secondary pupil was £1,902 and £2,466 respectively, and the highest sum of money allocated per primary pupil and per secondary pupil was £3,576 and £7,247 respectively.

1997–98 SSA per pupil

£

LEA	*Primary per 5–10 pupil*	*Secondary per 11–15 pupil*
Isles of Scilly	3,576	4,702
Tower Hamlets	3,217	4,262
Hackney	3,179	4,331
Lambeth	3,106	4,403
Southwark	3,029	4,030
City of London	3,017	7,247
Islington	2,999	4,027
Camden	2,975	3,741
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,955	3,827
Lewisham	2,936	3,889
Greenwich	2,810	3,680
Westminster	2,789	3,579
Wandsworth	2,779	3,670
Haringey	2,762	3,722
Newham	2,752	3,619
Kensington and Chelsea	2,711	3,631
Brent	2,648	3,579
Waltham Forest	2,563	3,400
Ealing	2,480	3,331
Slough	2,448	3,278
Hounslow	2,440	3,155
Barking and Dagenham	2,429	3,214
Enfield	2,398	3,132
Knowsley	2,381	3,178
Croydon	2,361	3,126
Manchester	2,359	3,138
Redbridge	2,323	3,037
Merton	2,314	3,030
Barnet	2,300	2,976
Liverpool	2,295	3,022
Harrow	2,267	3,000
Nottingham City	2,264	2,996
Hillingdon	2,262	2,969
Luton	2,244	2,958
Birmingham	2,240	2,961
Thurrock	2,239	2,939
Sutton	2,219	2,866
Leicester	2,208	2,899
Bexley	2,206	2,888
Middlesbrough	2,199	2,936
Bromley	2,180	2,840
Blackburn	2,179	2,849
Southampton	2,179	2,889
Havering	2,176	2,853
Brighton and Hove	2,173	2,847
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,171	2,847
Oxfordshire	2,047	2,670
Herefordshire	2,046	2,707
St. Helens	2,045	2,696
Durham	2,043	2,686
Stoke on Trent	2,043	2,692
West Sussex	2,043	2,675
Norfolk	2,042	2,675
Bolton	2,042	2,674
Lincolnshire	2,041	2,676
Leeds	2,041	2,681
North Lincolnshire	2,039	2,673
Barnsley	2,038	2,687
Sefton	2,038	2,662
Darlington	2,037	2,684
Rotherham	2,037	2,655
Plymouth	2,034	2,645
Bournemouth	2,033	2,650
Lancashire	2,026	2,657
Tameside	2,025	2,649
Devon	2,024	2,668

1997–98 SSA per pupil

£

LEA	Primary per 5–10 pupil	Secondary per 11–15 pupil
Cumbria	2,022	2,644
Northumberland	2,016	2,639
North Tyneside	2,015	2,665
Hampshire	2,007	2,630
North Yorkshire	2,006	2,603
Shropshire	2,000	2,612
Northamptonshire	1,999	2,621
Somerset	1,996	2,621
Newbury	1,994	2,591
Trafford	1,993	2,603
Cambridgeshire	1,989	2,613
Wakefield	1,988	2,604
Wiltshire	1,988	2,603
Suffolk	1,983	2,599
Swindon	1,979	2,601
Gloucestershire	1,977	2,585
Bury	1,972	2,559
Nottinghamshire	1,969	2,581
Wigan	1,969	2,573
Dorset	1,963	2,565
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,961	2,561
Solihull	1,961	2,540
Warwickshire	1,960	2,573
Worcestershire	1,957	2,558
Dudley	1,954	2,559
Cheshire	1,952	2,542
Kingston upon Thames	2,169	2,825
Isle of Wight Council	2,166	2,841
Portsmouth	2,163	2,832
City of Kingston upon Hull	2,159	2,835
Reading	2,153	2,897
Bradford	2,151	2,845
Wolverhampton	2,150	2,849
Sandwell	2,139	2,808
Salford	2,139	2,814
Hertfordshire	2,135	2,789
Southend	2,135	2,809
Milton Keynes	2,133	2,814
Halton	2,128	2,811
Richmond upon Thames	2,126	2,728
Coventry	2,123	2,787
South Tyneside	2,121	2,780
Doncaster	2,116	2,783
Rochdale	2,114	2,806
Surrey	2,109	2,764
Redcar and Cleveland	2,105	2,739
Kent	2,104	2,759
Essex	2,104	2,761
Bracknell Forest	2,104	2,753
Oldham	2,102	2,732
Wirral	2,100	2,764
Peterborough	2,100	2,756
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,098	2,705
Hartlepool	2,098	2,754
East Sussex	2,094	2,753
City of Bristol	2,093	2,784
Medway Towns	2,092	2,750
Sunderland	2,089	2,744
Derby	2,085	2,747
North East Lincolnshire	2,077	2,729
Gateshead	2,074	2,737
Walsall	2,071	2,702
Sheffield	2,068	2,725
Stockton-on-Tees	2,066	2,707
Kirklees	2,066	2,719
Buckinghamshire	2,064	2,712
The Wrekin	2,060	2,701
Cornwall	2,057	2,698
Bedfordshire	2,055	2,696
Torbay	2,055	2,698
Calderdale	2,050	2,690
Blackpool	2,048	2,739
Derbyshire	1,952	2,565
York	1,946	2,565
Poole	1,942	2,540
Rutland	1,942	2,466
North Somerset	1,942	2,553
Stockport	1,939	2,548
Warrington	1,939	2,544
Staffordshire	1,935	2,534
Bath and North East Somerset	1,933	2,484
Wokingham	1,913	2,517
Leicestershire	1,905	2,504
South Gloucestershire	1,902	2,497
Total	2,130	2,782

Secondary Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many secondary schools were in the maintained sector in *(a)* 1998 or the most recent available date, *(b)* 1988, *(c)* 1978 and *(d)* 1968. [58345]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Number of maintained secondary schools in England

January of each year	Number
1968	5,222
1978	4,711
1988	4,153
1998	3,567

Todmorden Road Primary School

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he proposes to take on the leaking of the draft OFSTED report regarding Todmorden Road County Primary School, Burnley; and if he will make a statement. [58541]

Ms Estelle Morris: Arrangements for confidential oral feedback of OFSTED findings are set out in the Framework for School Inspection. I deplore any case in which formal publication arrangements are pre-empted by a breach of confidentiality, but this is not a matter in which the Department can intervene and I am not in a position to make any judgment on the case referred to.

Todmorden County Primary School is failing to provide an acceptable standard of education and requires special measures. The school and Lancashire LEA must now produce urgent plans to resolve the key issues identified in the OFSTED report so that it can be removed from special measures within 2 years.

New Secondary Schools

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many new secondary schools have been *(a)* started and *(b)* completed in each of the last five years; and in which council areas the schools are located. [58800]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the number of proposals approved and implemented in each Local Education Authority to establish new maintained secondary schools in each of the last three years. The list includes proposals which have been determined by the Local Education Authority and proposals by independent schools to join the maintained sector. A number of proposals have been decided but not yet implemented. Accurate information for earlier years is not available.

	Number approved	*Number implemented*
1996		
Sutton	1	—
East Sussex (pre 1 April 1997)	1	—
Surrey	1	—
Staffordshire (pre 1 April 1997)	1	—
1997		
Trafford	2	2
Kent (pre 1 April 1998)	1	1
Liverpool	1	—
Croydon	1	1
Ealing	1	—
Birmingham	1	1
Milton Keynes	1	—
Buckinghamshire (pre 1 April 1997)	—	1
Sutton	—	1
Surrey	—	1
Kent (pre 1 April 1998)	—	—
Staffordshire (pre 1 April 1997)	—	1
1998		
Newcastle upon Tyne	1	—
Wandsworth	1	—
Haringey	1	1
Wolverhampton	1	1
Kent (pre 1 April 1998)	1	1
Hillingdon	1	—
East Sussex (pre 1 April 1997)	1	1
Islington	1	—
Ealing	—	1

Education Funding (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of his Department's funding for education for the year 1997–98 has been allocated to the London Borough of Wandsworth. [58826]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department's funding for education in Wandsworth in 1997–98 consisted of some £91.7 million through the education SSA system, £1.5 million through grant for education support and training, £0.1 million for capital expenditure, and £0.1 million for the New Deal for Schools. These allocations represent 0.5 per cent. of the Department's total funding for education.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority the percentage of children in that local authority with statements of special educational needs. [58989]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The latest available data are drawn from schools' Annual Census returns to the Department and relate to January 1998. The table indicates, for each local education authority as at January 1998, the proportion of pupils attending schools in the authority's area who had statements expressed as a percentage of the total number of pupils in such schools.

Percentage of pupils with statements, January 1998

LEA	*Percentage*
Hartlepool	2.41
Middlesbrough	3.21
Redcar and Cleveland	2.14
Stockton-on-Tees	3.10
Darlington	3.38
Durham	3.56
Northumberland	2.92
Gateshead	2.31
Newcastle upon Tyne	2.58
North Tyneside	2.80
South Tyneside	2.97
Sunderland	3.55
Cheshire	3.34
Cumbria	3.92
Bolton	2.82
Bury	2.60
Manchester	2.47
Oldham	1.53
Rochdale	2.31
Salford	2.14
Stockport	2.68
Tameside	2.90
Trafford	1.73
Wigan	4.12
Lancashire	3.89
Knowsley	3.69
Liverpool	2.80
St. Helens	5.01
Sefton	2.92
Wirral	3.41
East Riding of Yorkshire	2.38
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	2.37
North East Lincolnshire	2.14
North Lincolnshire	2.39
York	2.54
North Yorkshire	2.41
Barnsley	3.06
Doncaster	5.34
Rotherham	3.41
Sheffield	2.89
Bradford	2.44
Calderdale	2.43
Kirklees	4.03
Leeds	3.22
Wakefield	2.90
Derby	3.08
Derbyshire	3.34
Leicester City	3.81
Rutland	1.66
Leicestershire	2.73
Lincolnshire	3.27
Northamptonshire	2.59
Nottinghamshire	1.20
Hereford and Worcester	2.83
Shropshire	4.01
Stoke	3.01
Staffordshire	3.35
Warwickshire	2.68
Birmingham	2.58
Coventry	2.42
Dudley	2.25
Sandwell	2.45
Solihull	1.85
Walsall	2.79
Wolverhampton	2.60
Luton	2.99
Bedfordshire	3.05

Percentage of pupils with statements, January 1998

LEA	Percentage
Cambridgeshire	3.19
Essex	2.25
Hertfordshire	2.77
Norfolk	3.38
Suffolk	3.08
City of London	0.11
Camden	3.16
Hackney	3.19
Hammersmith and Fulham	3.38
Haringey	2.55
Islington	3.54
Kensington and Chelsea	1.27
Lambeth	3.76
Lewisham	3.15
Newham	2.70
Southwark	2.83
Tower Hamlets	3.77
Wandsworth	3.10
Westminster	2.07
Barking and Dagenham	2.61
Barnet	1.85
Bexley	2.36
Brent	2.78
Bromley	3.28
Croydon	1.81
Ealing	2.21
Enfield	2.13
Greenwich	3.81
Harrow	2.68
Havering	2.80
Hillingdon	3.09
Hounslow	2.74
Kingston-upon-Thames	2.31
Merton	2.83
Redbridge	1.69
Richmond-upon-Thames	2.00
Sutton	2.89
Waltham Forest	3.27
Berkshire	2.92
Milton Keynes	3.83
Buckinghamshire	3.02
Brighton and Hove	4.27
East Sussex	2.98
Portsmouth	2.71
Southampton	2.89
Hampshire	2.60
Isle of Wight	3.89
Kent	3.19
Oxfordshire	2.39
Surrey	3.16
West Sussex	3.13
Bath and North East Somerset	2.72
City of Bristol	4.03
North Somerset	3.11
South Gloucestershire	3.13
Cornwall	4.30
Isles of Scilly	1.10
Devon	3.48
Bournemouth	2.31
Poole	3.10
Dorset	2.81
Gloucestershire	2.76
Somerset	2.92
Swindon	3.20
Wiltshire	2.37

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 29 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *233–34*, if the research project to assess the relative costs, benefits and practical implications of educating children with moderate learning difficulties in mainstream and special schools covers children assessed as having emotional, behavioural and psychiatric problems. [58992]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The research project recognises and allows for the fact that pupils with moderate learning difficulties may also have other special educational needs. The project, which is small-scale, does not cover those with emotional and behavioural or other difficulties who do not have moderate learning difficulties.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations he has received on special educational needs. [59291]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We received over 3,600 responses to consultation on the Green Paper, *Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs*. In the light of these, and the advice of the National Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs (SEN), we published *Meeting Special Educational Needs: A programme of action*, earlier this month. This sets out the practical steps we will take to support and promote developments in SEN over the next few years.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines his Department has issued on staffing levels at special needs schools for children with *(a)* severe and *(b)* moderate learning difficulties. [59258]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department issued guidance on staffing for pupils with special educational needs in 1990, in Circular 11/90. The Circular outlines the factors which Local Education Authorities and schools ought to consider in determining staffing levels, and is not intended to be prescriptive. Local Education Authorities and schools are best placed to determine their staffing needs in the light of local circumstances.

LEAs (Project Funding)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the funds which have been made available to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools for projects as part of the £19 billion extra spending on education as announced in the House by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 187–211. [58988]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* England's share of the additional £19 billion for education over the next three years is £16 billion. Increases in Education Standard Spending Assessments account for £7.135 billion of this. Local education authorities and schools will also benefit from substantial other additional resources, including an additional £1.5 billion for schools capital and a big increase in the Standards Fund. A number of areas are still to be finalised, and full details will be published in the Department's Annual Report in the spring.

Veterinary Science and Medicine Primary Degrees

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the typical offers of A-level grades required for students wishing to

pursue primary degrees in *(a)* veterinary science and *(b)* medicine in universities, broken down by university, for each of the last five academic years. [59294]

Mr. Mudie: The expected A-level grades required for entry to first degree courses in veterinary science and medicine are set out in the Universities and Colleges Entrance Guide published by the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS). Copies of the latest edition (covering 1999 entry) and those for the previous four years are available in the Library.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the examination failure rates for undergraduate students in universities pursuing primary degrees in *(a)* veterinary science and *(b)* medicine, broken down by (i) university and (ii) year of study for each of the last five academic years. [59296]

Mr. Mudie: Information on first degree examination failure rates by individual course and university or year of study is not compiled centrally.

Work is currently being undertaken by the funding bodies in the UK to produce progression statistics for each institution. After a period of consultation with individual institutions, this is intended to lead to the publication next year of progression rates which will reflect the numbers of students who do not complete courses, which will include those who do so as a result of examination failure.

Access to Work

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *404*, concerning access to work, what assessment he made of the implications of creating full-time councillors in drawing up the proposals for directly elected mayors and cabinets contained in the White Paper, In Touch with the People. [59229]

Ms Hodge: Access to Work provides help for disabled people who are in, or about to start, paid employment. Help can be provided for people who are employed or self-employed, full or part-time, permanent or temporary. Councillors do not come within the scope of the programme because their activities are not regarded as their main paid employment. If this situation changes, and the activities of councillors become their main paid employment, then they may be eligible for Access to Work support.

Unemployment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish a table showing the levels of unemployment in each of the areas currently designated as *(a)* development areas and *(b)* intermediate areas under the provisions for regional selective assistance. [58718]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 10 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on unemployment.

The information you have requested can only be derived from the monthly claimant count of people claiming unemployment-related benefits (i.e. Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits). Essentially, all people who were claiming these benefits on the count day are counted.

The number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits in each of the areas currently designated as (a) development areas and (b) intermediate areas under the provisions for regional selective assistance can be obtained from the Nomis database which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Uganda

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in relieving the debts of Uganda owed to OECD countries. [57903]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

On 24 April this year, Uganda became the first country to reach its completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt initiative. This last tranche of multilateral debt relief resulted in a further debt reduction of $347 million in NPV terms (approximately equivalent to $650 million in nominal terms), on top of previous concessional reschedulings and aid loan write offs.

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in her private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56807]

(2) if she will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in her Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56805]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

Central America (Hurricane Mitch)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to provide aid to Nicaragua, and other Central American countries devastated by Hurricane Mitch. [59142]

Clare Short: We are responding to the immediate relief needs of the region as part of the international relief effort. This includes a contribution of £200,000 to the Red Cross Regional Appeal, approximately £60,000 to the Pan American Health Organisation for basic health care needs, £94,525 to CAFOD for food and household items and £100,000 to Christian Aid to supply medicines, temporary shelters, blankets and water containers for Honduras. In Nicaragua, we have channelled £32,585 through the non-governmental organisation CARE for the provision of safe water, food and clothes. We are also sending medical

supplies to El Salvador to meet the needs of 20,000 people for 3 months. In addition, HMS Sheffield provided immediate disaster assistance to Honduras, and RFA Sir Tristram and HMS Ocean are providing further support. We have also provided a UK expert to the United Nations Assessment and Co-ordination teams working in the region.

We have recently agreed an enlarged development programme for Central America and committed £6 million. We are currently refocusing the programme to take account of reconstruction needs.

Nicaragua and Honduras are both Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, as defined by the World Bank and IMF. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have called on the IMF and World Bank to look urgently at the case for special treatment in the matter of debt for countries afflicted by natural disasters which severely damage their economies. We are urging the international community to consider what exceptional debt relief measures might be appropriate in the short term for these countries.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid the UK Government are providing to victims of Hurricane Mitch; and if she will make a statement. [59255]

Clare Short: Since May 1997 my Department has been working to strengthen the capacity of the international system to respond very quickly to emergencies wherever they arise. In the past, uncoordinated shipments of aid and expertise often exacerbated rather than assisted such crises. The first step following Hurricane Mitch was that UN disaster assessment teams were mobilised. A British expert was made available. HMS Sheffield was in the vicinity and was helping in Belize and at the request of the local authorities was able to make available helicopters, engineers and medical support. DFID immediately contacted NGOs who were already working in the countries concerned to offer support. We have made available £200,000 to the Red Cross Regional Appeal and supplies were flown on Sunday.

In Honduras, we have contributed £60,000 to the Pan American Health organisation for basic health care needs, £94,525 to CAFOD for food and household items and a grant of £100,000 to Christian Aid to supply medicines, temporary shelters, blankets and water containers. In Nicaragua, we have channelled £32,585 through the NGO CARE for the provision of safe water, food and clothes. We are also sending medical supplies to El Salvador to meet the needs of 20,000 for three months. HMS Ocean and RFA Sir Tristram are also in the area and, at local request, are providing search and rescue and reconnaissance service.

We have recently agreed an enlarged development programme for Central America and committed £6 million. We are currently refocusing the programme to take account of reconstruction needs.

We must ensure that the reconstruction effort focuses on reducing vulnerability, for example by flood protection and through the appropriate location of new housing. It will also be necessary to strengthen local and regional capacity to respond more effectively when disaster strikes. We have recently agreed a major programme with the International Red Cross to strengthen such capacity in all developing countries.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid has been requested by the Nicaraguan Government from the UK to help the victims of Hurricane Mitch. [59256]

Clare Short: The Nicaraguan Government have requested international assistance to provide food, medicines, tents and construction materials to cope with the aftermath of the disaster. Our contributions so far have been channelled through the Red Cross and the non-governmental organisation CARE.

We continue to monitor the situation in Nicaragua closely through the United Nations, the Red Cross and our Embassy and we are in close contact with British non-governmental organisations about support to their relief activities. Beyond the immediate response to the emergency, we are considering how we can best use our recently enlarged assistance programme to help with reconstruction.

Nicaragua, is a heavily Indebted Poor Country, as defined by the World Bank and IMF. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have called on the IMF and World Bank to look closely, as part of the work they already have in hand on post-conflict debt relief, at the case for special treatment in the matter of debt for countries afflicted by natural disasters which severely damage their economies. We are urging the international community to consider what exceptional debt relief measures might be appropriate in the short term for these countries.

UNESCO

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will make a statement on the UK National Commission for UNESCO; [59252]

(2) if she will make a statement on the process for appointing members of the UK National Commission for UNESCO. [59253]

Clare Short: The structure and funding of a UK Commission for UNESCO, including the process for appointing members, are currently under discussion. It is my intention that the Commission be effective and economical. I hope that an announcement on the establishment of the Commission will be made shortly.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the costs of the UK's membership of UNESCO in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [59254]

Clare Short: The identifiable costs of the UK's membership of UNESCO were £16,185,671 in 1997–98, and are projected to be £11,304,718 in 1998–99.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997; [56817]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997. [56819]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many contracts are under investigation by his Department under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994. [57530]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* None. My Department has no powers to investigate complaints under the Regulations.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the combined heat and power schemes sanctioned this year and those schemes for which there are applications for consent outstanding, indicating the capacity of the scheme. [59165]

Mr. Battle: The following is the information requested:

Consents granted under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 during 1998 (England and Wales[1])

British Sugar, Bury St. Edmunds: 80 MWe

Bridgewater Paper, Ellesmere Port: 65 MWe

Applications currently under consideration under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (England and Wales[1])

Shotton Paper, Flintshire: 215 MWe

BNFL/Urenco, Capenhurst: 65 MWe

ICI Runcorn, Cheshire: 140 MWe

British Sugar, York: 70 MWe

Hickson & Welch, Castleford: 56 MWe

Sappi Europe, Blackburn: 60 MWe

Slough Heat and Power, Slough[3]: 92 MWe

Michelin Tyres, Stoke on Trent: 58 MWe

Clearances given under section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 (Great Britain[2])

British Sugar, Bury St. Edmunds: 80 MWe

Bridgewater Paper, Ellesmere Port: 65 MWe

BPB Paperboard, Mugiemoss: 49 MWe

BP Grangemouth, Stirlingshire: 130 MWe

Notifications currently under consideration under section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 (Great Britain[2])

Three notifications are currently under consideration. However these contain information which is classified as commercially confidential. When a decision on the particular notification is made it will be announced by way of Press Notice and placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible for those applications relating to Scotland.

[2] Section 14(1) empowers the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to regulate, for reasons of energy policy, the construction of power stations to be fuelled by natural gas or oil.

[3] This is an increase from 80 MWe to 92 MWe of an existing combined heat and power station. The increase will be fuelled by bio-fuel.

EC Directives

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the EC Directives due to come before Parliament in the session commencing November 1998 which will be the responsibility of his Department. [58530]

Mr. Mandelson: Scrutiny by Parliament of European legislation is a continuing process involving deposit in Parliament of documents which fall within the terms of reference of the scrutiny committees of both Houses of Parliament. These include formal legislative documents such as proposals for Directives, Regulations and Decisions.

The Commission's work programmes, which are deposited in the House, outline areas in which it will seek to legislate and give an indication of the Directives which may come before the Scrutiny Committees in the next session.

PRIME MINISTER

Life Peers

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the procedures for and list the committees, and their membership, involved in selecting candidates to be proposed for appointment as life peers; and what changes to these arrangements he proposes to make following the abolition of hereditary peers' rights to vote. [58681]

The Prime Minister: Under this and the previous administration, there has been no formal committee structure in the selection of candidates for appointment as life peers. We will announce our proposals for changes in the way life peers are appointed in due course.

Anglo-Irish Secretariat

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons are presently working in the Anglo-Irish Secretariat at Maryfield; on what date Maryfield will be closed; and if he will make a statement. [59287]

The Prime Minister: The British and Irish sides of the Secretariat comprise 26 full and part-time British and Irish civil servants.

The offices of the Secretariat at Maryfield will close by the end of the year.

Public Bodies

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Prime Minister how many non-departmental public bodies have been *(a)* established and *(b)* abolished since 1 May 1997. [59208]

The Prime Minister: Since 1 May 1997, the Government have abolished 44 non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and have established 30, including bodies such as the Low Pay Commission, the Disability

Rights Task Force and the New Deal Task Force which will help the Government fulfil their Manifesto commitments. The Government have also announced plans to abolish a further 37 NDPBS and Ministers are continuing to examine all the NDPBs they sponsor with a view to identifying further candidates for abolition.

Surveillance Commissioners

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an announcement about arrangements to appoint the Surveillance Commissioners under Part III of the Police Act 1997. [59445]

The Prime Minister: I appointed Sir Andrew Leggatt as the Chief Surveillance Commissioner in July. In accordance with section 91 of the Police Act 1997, I have, in addition, appointed six Surveillance Commissioners for a period of three years. There will be three Commissioners for England and Wales, two for Scotland and one for Northern Ireland. However, the remit of each Commissioner will cover the whole of the United Kingdom so that any Commissioner will be able to act in jurisdictions other than his own.

The Commissioners, who must hold or have held high judicial office, are:

For England and Wales

Sir Christopher Staughton—retired as a Lord Justice of Appeal in December 1997.

Sir Michael Hutchison—a Lord Justice of Appeal who will be retiring in January 1999.

Sir Charles McCullough—retired in January 1998 as the senior judge of the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court.

For Scotland

Lord Davidson—retired in 1996 as a Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland.

Lord Bonomy—a Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland since 1997.

For Northern Ireland

Sir John MacDermott—retired in August 1998 as the senior Lord Justice of Appeal in Northern Ireland.

The Commissioners are the first to be appointed under the provisions of Part III of the Police Act 1997. Since the authorisation of intrusive surveillance operations forms a key component of the Government's response to serious and organised crime, I attach considerable importance to the early implementation of these provisions, and I am delighted that the Commissioners have accepted their appointments. In conjunction with Sir Andrew Leggatt, their substantial judicial experience, particularly of the criminal justice system, will provide independent oversight of surveillance operations, which although operationally important, must also be subject to stringent safeguards.

In the more sensitive categories of intrusive surveillance, application will be made to a Commissioner for prior approval of authorisations and renewals given by chief officers of police, the National Crime Squad, the National Criminal Intelligence Service and HM Customs and Excise. The Commissioners will also be responsible for scrutinising notifications and renewals of all other surveillance operations, together with cancellations, and for investigating complaints that authorisations have been improperly given.

The Commissioners will have the power to quash or cancel authorisations where there are no reasonable grounds for believing that they meet the criteria set out in Part III of the Police Act 1997. They may also order the destruction of records (other than those required for pending criminal or civil proceedings) and the payment of compensation where a complaint is upheld. The decisions of the Commissioners will be subject to appeal to the Chief Commissioner, but are not liable to be questioned in court.

Sudan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *915*, what advice he received on the production of EMPTA as a bi-product of tests on insecticides and pesticides for use in Africa. [57344]

The Prime Minister: On the basis of information available to them the Americans advised that there are no known commercial reasons to produce EMPTA nor are CBD Porton Down aware of any commercial uses for EMPTA.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he has been notified of the exact circumstances surrounding the finding of EMPTA at the El Shifa plant; and in what quantities they were found; [57345]

(2) what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to verify the information from the United States concerning the strike against the El Shifa factory; [57346]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *915*, what assessment he has made of the possibility that the EMPTA alleged to have been found in soil samples close to the pharmaceutical factory in the Sudan could have been the hydrolysis product of an insecticide or germicide chemical for *(a)* military and *(b)* commercial test purposes; [57347]

(4) what *(a)* independent scientific organisations and *(b)* United Kingdom universities have been invited to assess whether the American claims about the Sudanese factories are true. [57348]

The Prime Minister: It is established practice under Section 1(c) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information received in confidence from foreign Governments.

Economic Forecasts

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 870, if he will list the forecasts which indicate that there will be a pick-up in growth after next year. [59293]

The Prime Minister: Full details of independent forecasts for the medium-term were published in "Forecasts for the UK Economy" by HM Treasury on 19 August.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Members of Parliament (Criminal Offences)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Attorney-General what contact he or his Department have had with *(a)* the Crown

Prosecution Service and *(b)* the Metropolitan Police following recent allegations of criminal offences involving a Member of Parliament. [58850]

The Attorney-General: It is the practice that I am informed (but not usually consulted about) any case involving a Member of Parliament under consideration by the Crown Prosecution Service. I have not been informed of any such case in the recent past but on two occasions the Crown Prosecution Service raised with my officials concerns about the possible impact of publicity on a criminal case. It is my policy not to give details of discussions about individual cases.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the *(a)* tonnage and *(b)* value of British beef sold in the United Kingdom during September; and if he will make a statement. [57438]

Mr. Rooker: This information is not held centrally. However, the market research company Audits of Great Britain conducts a monthly survey of household consumption on behalf of the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC). The latest figures, for the four week period up to 20 September 1998, show that 16,988 tonnes of beef were consumed in this period and expenditure on this beef was £76.5 million. It should be noted that these figures include imported beef but exclude beef consumed in NI, beef used in processing and beef used in the catering sector. Separate information from the MLC suggests that, for the first half of 1998, 79 per cent. of all beef consumed in the UK was home produced, up 7 percentage points on the same period last year.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the policy of the fisheries regulating authority of the Commission of the European Community in respect of *(a)* off-quota catches by line fishermen in the territorial waters of the United Kingdom and *(b)* fisheries within territorial limits of a member state shown to be self sustainable. [57483]

Mr. Morley: All landings of fish of stocks subject to quotas count against Member States' quotas whether or not the fish are caught within territorial waters and regardless of the means used to catch the fish. Such restrictions do not apply to stocks of fish and shellfish for which quotas are not set.

Member States are able to apply additional national conservation rules to their own fisherman. Many such rules are applied by Sea Fisheries Committees within the 6 mile limits around the coasts of England and Wales.

Battery Cages

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the policy his Department will adopt on the European Commission proposals on battery cages; and how he will ensure that third country imports comply with EU regulations. [57746]

Mr. Morley: Our policy is to negotiate for an early phase out of the battery cage, improved standards in the interim and appropriate EU wide standards for non-cage systems. We recognise that the implications of any different standards applying in the case of third country imports have to be taken into account and have already taken steps to ensure that these are considered: an obligation has been placed on the European Commission to produce a report on this aspect by 30 June 1999.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he plans to take to encourage red meat and poultry slaughterhouses to have a written welfare policy for the protection of animals; and if he will make a statement; [58169]

(2) what steps he plans to take to *(a)* encourage slaughterhouses to keep detailed records of the testing and maintenance of all stunning devices and *(b)* encourage red meat and poultry slaughterhouses to ensure that all staff involved in the stunning and slaughter of animals have received formal training in animal welfare; and if he will make a statement; [58171]

(3) what steps he plans to take to require poultry slaughterhouses to have devices for the metering and monitoring of the electric current supplied at stunning. [58166]

Mr. Morley: I have welcomed the recommendations of the Meat Hygiene Service Animal Welfare Survey Report 1997–98 that slaughterhouse operators should develop a written policy for the protection of animals in their care and increase formal welfare training together with other recommendations in respect of stunning equipment and record keeping. The Survey assessed compliance with the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 and was also designed to identify slaughterhouses operating to standards beyond the statutory minimum and to encourage other premises to adopt these higher standards. As a part of the Survey process, Official Veterinary Surgeons discussed reports with individual slaughterhouse operators to initiate, where appropriate, changes intended to improve animal welfare standards.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* sheep, *(b)* goats, *(c)* cattle and *(d)* chickens were slaughtered by a religious method without prior stunning in 1997. [58167]

Mr. Morley: Information is not held separately on the number of animals slaughtered by a religious method without stunning. The Meat Hygiene Service Animal Welfare Survey Report 1997–98 indicated that, at the time the survey was carried out, 26 slaughterhouses killed cattle and/or sheep and 19 poultry by the Jewish or Muslim method without stunning.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he plans to take to ensure that slaughterhouses using electrical stunning apparatus comply with the requirements of the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 that *(a)* the apparatus must incorporate a fail-safe device which prevents its operation unless a current sufficient to stun the animal unconscious can be passed, *(b)* a device indicating the voltage and current being used must be

clearly visible to the operator and *(c)* the apparatus must incorporate an audible or visible device indicating the length of time of its application to an animal. [58170]

Mr. Morley: The development of new systems which measure impedance and control current flow will make it easier for slaughterhouse operators to comply fully with this requirement. We are closely monitoring the work being done on this so that as soon as such systems become commercially available we will be ready to take any additional enforcement action which may be necessary. In addition, the Meat Hygiene Service will provide Official Veterinary Surgeons with additional technical information and guidance on electrical stunning systems to help them to assess existing equipment.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effect of World Trade Organisation decisions on animal welfare legislation in the United Kingdom. [58224]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* WTO rules have no effect on legislation on the welfare of farm animals in the UK. There is, however, a need for attention to be given to the question of animal welfare standards to which products imported into the EU are produced. As a result of initiatives made during our Presidency, the European Commission has been expressly charged with producing a report on the implications of third country welfare standards which differ from those in the Community.

Milk

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to revise his Department's advice on the safety of milk following the finding of abnormal prion protein in the appendix of a patient in Torbay; and if he will make a statement. [57000]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to revise present advice relating to the safety of milk. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) advises Government on all matters connected with Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies. As part of its remit SEAC is kept informed of new scientific findings and keeps its advice on matters under review. At its meeting in April it re-affirmed earlier advice in relation to milk that no further measures were needed to protect public health.

The finding of the abnormal prion protein in the appendix of a patient who subsequently died of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease tells us nothing about the possibility of infectivity being present in cow's milk. Furthermore milk from clinically affected cattle has been tested by bioassay in mice and no evidence of infectivity has been found.

TREASURY

Labour Statistics (Scotland)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment in each constituency in Scotland (i) in May 1997 and (ii) at the most recent available date. [58340]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 10 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on full-time and part-time employment in each constituency in Scotland.

The statistics you request are derived from the ONS Annual Employment Survey (AES). However, the latest results are for September 1996, and before then at September 1995. This information can be obtained from the Nomis database which is accessible by the House of Commons Library.

The figures for September 1997 are planned to be available from NOMIS from May 1999.

Unemployment

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what number of unemployed people has been assumed for each of the next three years for the purpose of calculating social security spending plans in the Comprehensive Spending Review. [58507]

Mr. Byers: In line with the convention adopted by previous governments we do not publish forecasts for unemployment.

Abortions

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of abortions in Clwyd, South were funded by the NHS in the last year for which figures are available. [58719]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 10 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on abortions.

Information on the number of abortions performed on residents of each parliamentary constituency is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ONS routinely publishes abortion statistics by regions and health authorities (HA). In 1997, the latest year for which provisional figures are available, 86 per cent. of abortions performed on residents of North Wales HA were funded by the NHS.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of abortions funded by the NHS for women living in Harrow, West in each of the last five years. [58833]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Gareth R. Thomas, dated 10 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on NHS abortions in Harrow West.

Information on the number of abortions performed on residents of each parliamentary constituency is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The ONS routinely publishes abortion statistics by regions and health authorities (HA). The following table shows the percentage of abortions funded by the NHS for residents of Brent and Harrow HA.

Percentage of abortions funded by the NHS for residents of Brent and Harrow HA, 1993–97

Year	*Percentage*
1993	52
1994	53
1995	62
1996	69
1997[1]	77

[1] Provisional

Euro

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department has taken to advertise the benefits of the United Kingdom Government's decision not to join the euro to potential inward investors. [58680]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury's assessment of the impact on inward investment in the UK of the Government's decision not to join the single currency in the first-wave was set out in the five economic tests assessment published in October 1997. The UK currently attracts a significantly larger share of inward investment than other countries in the EU. This reflects a number of important benefits that we offer including low taxes, the English language, a flexible and adaptable workforce and a commitment to lasting economic stability.

The Government believe that, while the UK remains insufficiently converged with the other European economies, there would be risks for stability, and hence for inward investment in the UK, if the UK joined EMU. The Government have set in place new frameworks for fiscal and monetary policy which will help to deliver the economic stability which international investors look for in making their decisions.

The Government continue to promote in all major international markets, the inherent strengths which have made, and will maintain, the UK as the most attractive European location for inward investment.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the terms of reference of the Committee on Implementation of the Euro which he is establishing and on its accountability to the House. [58872]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The Cross-Party Advisory Group on Preparations for EMU is an informal group which will act as a channel for the exchange of information and develop cross-party awareness of the continuing preparations for the euro. It will also play an advisory role in relation to the Standing Committee on preparations for EMU.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter of 6 July from the right hon. Member for Wells requesting that he give estimates for the change-over costs of joining a single European currency. [59100]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Shortly.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of people in the Tynemouth constituency who will benefit from the introduction of the minimum wage. [59007]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Campbell, dated 10 November 1998:

As the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the introduction of the minimum wage.

The national minimum wage (NMW) will become effective in April 1999 and has been set at £3.60 for workers aged over 21. A development rate of £3.00 per hour will apply for those aged 18 to 21. Workers aged 16 and 17 and all those on apprenticeships will be exempt.

The Low Pay Commission, in arriving at their recommendations, had to adjust 1999 pay rates to 1998 values. Their methodology produces £3.50 and £2.90 as the 1998 values of the government's preferred rates.

The preferred method for assessing the coverage of the proposed NMW is to present adjusted NES and Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for the number of employees earning less than the proposed NMW rates. This method adjusts for the fact that the NES is based on a one per cent. sample of employees in the PAYE system and is therefore likely to under-represent relatively low paid staff, earning below the tax-threshold, and in particular those who work part-time. It is not possible to use this method for small areas, and information solely from the NES, has therefore been provided. Regrettably, NES cannot provide statistically reliable estimates for Tynemouth constituency, therefore information for Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County has been provided.

The latest available information from the 1998 New Earnings Survey shows that 4.5 per cent. of workers over 21 years of age in Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County earn less than £3.50 per hour and 4.7 per cent. of workers aged 18 to 21 years earn less than £2.90 per hour. The information is given as a proportion of workers because appropriate grossing factors for the NES sample are not available at very detailed levels of disaggregation.

The extent of the bias in the NES data may be estimated for the North East by using the adjusted NES and LFS data for all employees. This suggests that the estimate of the overall proportion of full-time employees aged over 21 years earning below £3.50 could understate the true position by as much as 5 percentage points. However, it is unlikely that the occurrence of lower paid jobs is uniform across the region, and so it would be wise to treat this figure as broadly indicative rather than as a precise estimate. I am unable to provide the bias for employees aged 18 to 21 years because the sample size is too small for a reliable estimate to be produced.

Marriage (Special Licences)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were married by special licence in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in each of the last five years. [59022]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Patrick McLoughlin, dated 10 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of people married by special licence in England and Wales.

The information required is as follows:

Number of marriages solemnised in the Church of England/ Church in Wales on issue of a special licence granted by, or on behalf of, the Archbishop of Canterbury

Year of marriage	*Country of marriage*	
	England	*Wales*
1991	2,974	54
1992	2,876	53
1993	2,761	49
1994	2,328	35
1995	2,201	36

Source:
Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics, annual reference series FM2

Tax Credits

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people in the Tynemouth constituency who will benefit from the disabled person's tax credit; [59008]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of families in the Tynemouth constituency who will benefit from working families' tax credit. [59011]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that estimates for individual constituencies are not available.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessments his Department has made of the risk of fraud and wage substitution in relation to the introduction of the working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [58277]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) will build on, and replace, Family Credit from October 1999 and it will help make more families better off in work than on benefit. WFTC will be administered by the Inland Revenue who have considerable experience and expertise in detecting and combating fraud.

The Revenue's compliance strategy is being designed with input from those currently involved in running Family Credit and countering fraud.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are proposed to ensure that employers do not claim working families tax credit and then fail to pass it on to their employees. [58973]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Employers will not be able to claim working families tax credit on behalf of their employees. They will pay the tax credit to their employees when notified by the Inland Revenue and they will generally set off the amount of tax credit against their tax and NICs liabilities. The Inland Revenue will put in place arrangements to monitor the operation of the new WFTC system.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer where a claim form for the working families tax credit is issued if it will be addressed to the principal carer or to the worker in the couple. [58976]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Claim forms will be available from a number of sources but where they are sent out by the Inland Revenue they will generally be addressed to the person who requests it. In addition, claim forms will be sent to those who are approaching their renewal date.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average weekly gain from the introduction of the working families tax credit; and if he will provide a separate estimate for *(a)* homebuyers, *(b)* renters and *(c)* non-householders. [58596]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Estimates of the average weekly gain for those in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit in Great Britain in 1999–2000 are given in the table. Estimates relate to gains in Working Families Tax Credit.

	Average gain, £ per week
Owner Occupiers	19.50
Renters	15.10
Non-householders	17.00
Total	17.20

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer where a family opts not to receive the working families tax credit through the pay packet, by what means it will be delivered if the claimant does not have a bank account? [58975]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* A couple will have the option of which one of them is to receive the Working Families Tax Credit. From April 2000, if the person who is to receive the WFTC is not in employment they will be paid directly by the Inland Revenue, who are looking at how this can best be done, including to those without bank accounts.

Fuel Excise Duty

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the current rates of excise duty per litre on (i) standard unleaded petrol, (ii) leaded petrol, (iii) standard diesel and (iv) low-sulphur diesel in each country of the European Union. [58705]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The current rates of excise duty per litre on (i) standard unleaded petrol, (ii) leaded petrol, (iii) standard diesel and in each country of the European Union are:

	Leaded petrol pence per litre	*Unleaded petrol pence per litre*	*Standard diesel pence per litre*
Austria	n/a	28.34	19.81
Belgium	38.66	34.68	19.83
Denmark	n/a	30.94	21.02
Finland	n/a	38.23	20.81
France	43.17	40.32	25.36
Germany	n/a	34.27	21.68
Greece	24.18	20.93	15.34
Ireland	31.36	26.11	22.75
Italy	39.33	36.17	26.45
Luxembourg	27.31	23.75	17.29
Netherlands	n/a	39.27	23.16
Portugal	34.25	32.03	19.24
Spain	27.24	25.01	18.16
Sweden	n/a	33.69	20.14
United Kingdom	49.26	43.99	44.99

The excise duty rate in the United Kingdom for low-sulphur diesel is 42.99 pence per litre. Rates of excise duty on low-sulphur diesel are not available for the countries of the European Union other than the United Kingdom.

VAT

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when a decision will be made on the review of the VAT registration threshold. [58889]

Dawn Primarolo: The representations received by Customs to their consultation document on the Review of the VAT Registration Threshold are currently being evaluated. No decisions on the various proposals will be made until after this evaluation is complete.

Growth Forecasts

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the margin of error used in his growth forecast for the next financial year. [59295]

Ms Hewitt: Information on error margins surrounding the Treasury's growth forecasts was set out in table A7 of the Pre-Budget Report published on 3 November.

Alcohol and Tobacco Duty

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rules will apply to *(a)* European commissioners, *(b)* members of the European Parliament and *(c)* accredited diplomats regarding the payment of excise duties on alcohol and tobacco products after 30 June 1999. [59269]

Dawn Primarolo: Diplomats who are accredited to the Court of St. James are entitled to certain privileges and immunities in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961. These privileges and immunities will continue after 30 June 1999.

The fiscal arrangements for officials and representatives of European institutions are determined by the host nation within which the institution is located.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason projected revenues from tobacco duty for 1998–99 have been reduced; and if he will make a statement. [59270]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs' forecast for tobacco duty receipts in 1998–99 has been reduced because receipts in the financial year to date have been lower than hitherto expected. It is too early to have a robust explanation for this decrease.

SCOTLAND

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56816]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56814]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70.*

Community Land Purchase

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much is planned to be made available annually from National Lottery funds for community land purchase in Scotland. [57761]

Mr. Galbraith: A consultation paper on proposed new initiatives to be funded by the New Opportunities Fund will be published shortly. Ministers will subsequently consider the allocation of funds to whatever new initiatives are brought forward in the light of that consultation.

Hill Farmers

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the income for hill farmers in Scotland as *(a)* a total and *(b)* an average per farmer in 1997–98; and what are the predictions for income in the current financial year. [58015]

Mr. Macdonald: Estimates of Hill Farm Incomes will be published by The Scottish Office on 30 November with accompanying statistical tables placed in the library of the House.

Rowett Research Institute

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the research projects at the Rowett Research Institute which the Government have provided part funding for in each of the last five years; and who its research funding partners have been in each case. [57912]

Mr. Macdonald: Listed in the table are the research projects at the Rowett Research Institute which the Government have provided part funding for in each of the last five years. The research funding partners are shown alongside.

Project	*Funding partners*
1998–99	
Melatonin receptors in finfish	EU
Identification of species in processed seafood products using DNA-based diagnostic techniques	EU
Advanced methods for identification and quality monitoring of (heat) processed fish	EU
Metabolic manipulation of milk protein output in the dairy cow	Milk Development Council/Purina Mills/Hendrix Voeders
Effect of transforming growth factor on proton co-genes, tumor suppressor genes and cell cycle regulators: growth arrest versus apoptosis	EU

Project	*Funding partners*
Effect of copper in the food chain on human health	EU
Improving the quality of nutritional value of processed foods by optimal use of food antioxidants	EU
Seasonal dietary antioxidant levels in relation to human health	EU
1997–98	
Melatonin receptors in finfish	EU
The identification of canned tuna species by characterisation of the nucleic acids	EU
Identification of species in processed seafood products using DNA-based diagnostic techniques	EU
Metabolic manipulation of milk protein output in the dairy cow	Milk Development Council/Purina Mills/Hendrix Voeders
Advanced methods for identification and quality monitoring of (heat) processed fish	EU
Effect of transforming growth factor on proton co-genes, tumor suppressor genes and cell cycle regulators: growth arrest versus apoptosis	EU
Effect of copper in the food chain on human health	EU
Improving the quality of nutritional value of processed foods by optimal use of food antioxidants	EU
Increased fruit and vegetable consumption within the EC: potential health benefits	EU
The comet assay: application in genotoxicity testing and as a screening method for assessing the exposure of human populations	EU
1996–97	
Metabolic manipulation of milk protein output in the dairy cow	Milk Development Council/Purina Mills/Hendrix Voeders
Effect of transforming growth factor on proton co-genes, tumor suppressor genes and cell cycle regulators: growth arrest versus apoptosis	EU
Effect of copper in the food chain on human health	EU
Improving the quality of nutritional value of processed foods by optimal use of food antioxidants	EU
Increased fruit and vegetable consumption within the EC: potential health benefits	EU
The comet assay: application in genotoxicity testing and as a screening method for assessing the exposure of human populations	EU
Translation modification of gene expression to promote secretion of intercellular proteins	EU
Dietary enzymes to improve nutrient flow in ruminants	J. Bibby Ltd./Nutec/Novo/Roche/Trouw UK/Trident Foods
Dry fractionation of cereal straw to separate botanical components	Compak/Dalgetty/Turner/Finfeeds/St. Regis/Silsoe
Enhanced recovery from crop materials	Home Grown Cereals Authority/Dalgetty/BOCM/Finfeeds/ Roche/Rhone/Novo/Park Tonks
1995–96	
Metabolic manipulation of milk protein output in the dairy cow	British Petroleum/Milk Marketing Board
Increased fruit and vegetable consumption within the EC: potential health benefits	EU
The comet assay: application in genotoxicity testing and as a screening method for assessing the exposure of human populations	EU
Translation modification of gene expression to promote secretion of intercellular proteins	EU
Dry fractionation of cereal straw to separate botanical components	Compak/Dalgetty/Turner/Finfeeds/St. Regis/Silsoe
Enhanced recovery from crop materials	Home Grown Cereals Authority/Dalgetty/BOCM/Finfeeds/ Roche/Rhone/Novo/Park Tonks
Utilisation of crop residues and supplementary feeds	EU
Pig muscle fibre characteristics as a source of variation in eating quality	Meat and Livestock Commission
1994–95	
Metabolic manipulation of milk protein output in the dairy cow	British Petroleum/Milk Marketing Board
Increased fruit and vegetable consumption within the EC: potential health benefits	EU
Dry fractionation of cereal straw to separate botanical components	Compak/Dalgetty/Turner/Finfeeds/St. Regis/Silsoe
Enhanced recovery from crop materials	Home Grown Cereals Authority/Dalgetty/BOCM/Finfeeds/ Roche/Rhone/Novo/Park Tonks
Utilisation of crop residues and supplementary feeds	EU
Pig muscle fibre characteristics as a source of variation in eating quality	Meat and Livestock Commission

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the United Kingdom Government funding which has gone to the Rowett Research Institute for each of the last five years. [57911]

Mr. Macdonald: The table lists the United Kingdom Government funding received by the Rowett Research Institute for the last 5 financial years.

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department	6.231	6.190	6.225	6.244	6.249
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	0.489	0.540	0.757	0.860	0.850
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	0	0.010	0.012	0.024	0.002
Scottish Office Department of Health	0	0	0	0.052	0.045
British Council	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.003
Others	0.004	0	0.002	0.009	0.011
Total	6.726	6.743	6.998	7.191	7.161

Public Expenditure Summaries

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of the public expenditure summaries published in Cm 3914; and if he will make a statement. [57926]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* Public expenditure figures published in Cm 3914 have now been superseded by those announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper, Cm 4011. I am placing a detailed breakdown of the latest figures for 1998–99 to 2001–02 in the library of the House of Commons, and making them available to all main political parties in Scotland.

Police Vehicles (Accidents)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police vehicles from each police force in Scotland have been involved in accidents in each year since 1992; and how many fatalities have resulted. [58271]

Mr. McLeish: The number of police vehicles from Scottish police forces involved in accidents and the number of fatalities that resulted are shown in the table.

	1992		*1993*		*1994*		*1995–96*		*1996–97*		*1997–98*		*Total*	
	A	*F*	*A*	*F*	*A*	*F*	*A*	*F*	*A*	*F*	*A*	*F*	*A*	*F*
Central	46	0	49	0	44	0	49	0	62	0	43	0	293	0
Dumfries and Galloway	44	0	52	0	71	0	84	0	23	5	22	0	296	5
Fife	116	0	78	0	91	0	129	0	68	1	79	0	561	1
Grampian	101	0	267	0	173	0	106	1	123	0	119	0	889	1
Lothian and Borders	95	1	339	0	363	0	359	0	234	0	340	0	1,730	1
Northern	28	0	34	0	37	0	123	0	35	0	41	0	298	0
Strathclyde	456	2	504	0	688	2	714	0	575	3	551	0	3,488	7
Tayside	149	0	147	0	159	0	102	0	111	0	116	0	784	0
Total	1,035	3	1,470	0	1,626	2	1,666	1	1,231	9	1,311	0	8,339	15

Note:
A—Number of accidents
B—Number of fatalities

Disabled Tenants

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amounts were allocated to housing associations for aids and adaptations for disabled tenants in each of the last five years; and what is the estimated amount for 1998–99. [59216]

Mr. Macdonald: The information requested is not held centrally. Since Scottish Homes is responsible for allocating funding to housing associations in Scotland, I have asked the Chairman, Mr. John Ward, to write to my hon. Friend with the relevant information.

Territorial Army

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it is his policy to support the retention of a TA engineering presence in Scotland. [59250]

Mr. Dewar: I support a TA presence in Scotland that fulfils the modern role envisaged for the TA in the Strategic Defence Review. The detail of the structure of the TA is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Defence.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he believes civil authorities in the North of Scotland will be in a position to respond effectively to electricity or telecommunications failures which may result from the millennium bug. [59242]

Mr. Dewar: I am aware that the wide range of authorities who have responsibilities for responding to such failures, from whatever source, are constantly at a high level of preparedness.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision he has made for civil emergencies in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the North of Scotland as a result of the millennium bug. [59248]

Mr. Dewar: A wide variety of means has been employed to raise awareness, in both the public and private sectors, of the potential for problems arising and to stimulate appropriate action. This has been on an all-Scotland basis.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it will be his policy to request the use of TA engineering units in the event of civil emergency resulting from the millennium bug. [59243]

Mr. Dewar: Should any kind of civil emergency arise as a result of millennium bug problems, I am confident that the Scottish Executive would request military assistance if it considered that desirable. It would be for the armed services to determine whether any specific assistance was provided by the TA or otherwise.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what communications he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence regarding the provision of Territorial Army assistance to civil authorities in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the North of Scotland in the event of a civil emergency resulting from the millennium bug. [59249]

Mr. Dewar: I have emphasised to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence my concern that the ability of the Territorial Army in Scotland to provide military aid to the civil community should be maintained, and have drawn attention to the particular importance of this at a time when millennium bug problems could potentially pose a threat to key services. These points were made with respect to Scotland generally.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what extra resources *(a)* have been and *(b)* are planned to be made available to (i) local authorities, (ii) the NHS and (iii) the emergency services in Scotland to deal with millennium bug compliance. [59247]

Mr. Dewar: An additional £10 million is being made available to local authorities in Scotland for 1999–2000, to help them respond to demands placed on them by the millennium date change issue. Local authorities have discretion in the use of this money; they may use it to support action across any of the services they provide, including emergency services.

The Government have provided £151 million of new money for 1998–99 for the National Health Service in Scotland (NHSiS) on top of the £98 million which was already planned. Action in the NHSiS on the Millennium Date Change problem is being funded from within these increased general resources.

I do not expect to have to make further additional resources available. However, the situation remains under constant review.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which minister in his Department has responsibility for millennium bug compliance in Scotland. [59246]

Mr. Dewar: My noble Friend Lord Macdonald of Tradeston is responsible for Scottish Office action on the Millennium date change issue. That includes oversight of progress in the public sector in Scotland generally. However, primary responsibility for ensuring that particular public services in Scotland are not materially affected by the Millennium date change lies with senior managers of the services concerned.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the names of those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May 1997, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and whether they receive remuneration. [56824]

Mr. Denham: The information has been placed in the library.

Children Support

Mr. Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of children in the UK living in families dependent on supplementary benefits or income support in each year since 1979, and for each year these as a proportion of all children in the UK. [58297]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Number of children in families on Supplementary Benefit/Income Support as percentage of child population—Great Britain

Year	*Children aged less than 16*	*% of child population*
1979	923,000	7.3
1980	1,088,000	8.8
1981	1,493,000	12.3
1991	2,368,000	20.9
1998	2,224,000	19.0

Number of children in families on Supplementary Benefit/Income Support as percentage of child population—United Kingdom

Year	*Children aged less than 16*	*% of child population*
1982	1,826,000	14.8
1983	1,900,000	15.7
1984	2,059,000	17.3
1985	n/a	n/a
1986	2,250,000	19.3
1987	2,236,000	19.3
1988	2,202,000	19.1
1989	2,143,000	18.5
1990	2,155,000	18.5
1991	n/a	n/a
1992	2,831,000	23.9
1993	2,979,000	25.9
1994	3,105,000	25.7

Number of children in families on Supplementary Benefit/Income Support as percentage of child population—United Kingdom

Year	Children aged less than 16	% of child population
1995	3,090,000	25.5
1996	3,048,000	25.2
1997	2,399,000	19.8

Notes:

1. Figures for Northern Ireland for the years 1979–81, 1991 and 1998 are not available
2. No figures were produced for 1985 in the United Kingdom table as a result of industrial action
3. Children are defined as aged 0–15 years
4. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand
5. Income Support replaced Supplementary Benefit in 1988
6. Sample sizes: 1979–82 Supplementary Pension cases 1 in 200, Supplementary Allowance cases 1 in 50. 1983–87 Supplementary Pension cases 1 in 200, Supplementary Allowance cases 1 in 50. E (Unemployed) cases 1 in 100. 1988–93 1 in 100. 1994 to date 1 in 20
7. n/a denotes UK information not available
8. Figures are given for May of each year, except for 1982 to 1984 when the month was December, 1979 the month was November, and 1986 the month was February
9. Numbers from 1997 exclude children in families receiving Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance which replaced Income Support for the unemployed from October 1996
10. Percentage population figures for 1998 are based on Office for National Statistics mid-term estimates for 1997

Source:

1. Income Support/Supplementary Benefit Statistics Annual Enquiries 1979–93
2. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries 1994–98
3. Income Support Statistics, Northern Ireland
4. Office for National Statistics mid-term population estimates 1979–97

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of people who have ceased to receive incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance and who are drawing the disability working allowance who will gain a two year cover to return to benefit should they be forced to give up their job because of ill health. [58302]

Mr. Timms: Everyone who moves on to Disability Working Allowance from Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance can take advantage of the two-year linking rule which allows them to return to their former benefit, should they be forced to give up work because of ill health.

At April 1998, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 1,261 people who qualified for Disability Working Allowance via receipt of Severe Disablement Allowance, and 2,383 people who qualified via receipt of Incapacity Benefit.

Cyclical Benefit Payments

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total spent on cyclical benefit payments for each month from May 1997 to September 1998. [58506]

Angela Eagle: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated outturn of cyclical social security on a monthly basis for the financial year 1997–98

£ million

Month	Estimated outturn
May 1997	1,003
June 1997	1,012
July 1997	1,090
August 1997	974
September 1997	1,037
October 1997	1,040
November 1997	916
December 1997	1,092
January 1998	932
February 1998	904
March 1998	987

Notes:

1. Final outturn figures will be published in the 1999 Departmental Report
2. Figures on a similar basis for 1998–99 will not be available until November 1999 when the Appropriation Accounts are published
3. Cyclical Social Security has been defined as Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support to the under 60s

Expenditure Forecasts

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of future social security expenditure if the growth in output of the United Kingdom economy is *(a)* 0 per cent. for 1998–99 and 1 per cent. for 1999–2000 and 2000–01, *(b)* 0.5 per cent. for 1998–99, 1 per cent. for 1999–2000 and 1.5 per cent. for 2000–01 and *(c)* 1 per cent. for 1998–99, 1.5 per cent. for 1999–2000 and 2 per cent. for 2000–01. [58508]

Mr. Darling: Forecasts of future Social Security expenditure was published as part of the Pre-Budget Report (CM 4076) on 3 November 1998.

Disability Income Guarantee

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which parts of the disability income guarantee will be means-tested. [58510]

Mr. Timms: The disability income guarantee will provide extra help for the poorest disabled people with the highest care needs. It will be paid as part of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based), Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and will take the form of a new, higher rate of disability premium and a new, higher rate of disabled child premium for those getting the highest rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance.

Family Credit

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated expenditure on family credit for the current tax year. [58554]

Angela Eagle: The estimated expenditure on Family Credit for the current tax year is £2,498 million.

Note:

This figure is consistent with that in the Pre-Budget Report of 3 November 1998.

National Insurance

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps were taken to publicise

the consultation paper on the draft regulations to bring non-cash vouchers into Class 1 National Insurance liability; and what specific steps were taken to consult those organisations affected; [58480]

(2) if he will assess the impact on jobs in the UK catering sector of the proposal to bring luncheon vouchers into Class 1 National Insurance liability; [58481]

(3) what assessment he has made of the weekly cost to those employees in receipt of luncheon vouchers of the proposal to bring them into Class 1 National Insurance liability; [58511]

(4) to what extent the procedures outlined in the "Better Regulation Guide", published on 10 August, have been followed in respect of the draft regulations to bring non-cash vouchers into Class 1 National Insurance liability. [58479]

Mr. Timms: The Government proposals were announced during the passage of the Social Security Bill, 22 July 1997, *Official Report,* column 786 and 25 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns 468–69, and in DSS Press Release 97/127. The proposals are intended to introduce greater fairness in the National Insurance treatment of cash and non-cash earnings. The technical detail of the regulations were subject to a public consultation exercise which ran from 14 August to 14 September. Over 100 businesses and representatives were contacted, about 50 organisations or individuals replied.

An explanatory and financial memorandum, and a regulatory appraisal, were published alongside the Bill in July 1997. The regulatory costs and impact of the proposal to make non-cash vouchers liable for National Insurance in the same way as cash vouchers was set out in the Social Security Compliance Cost Assessment published in December 1997. A copy of that regulatory appraisal accompanied the consultation paper on the draft regulations issued in August.

The Better Regulation Guide gives Departments discretion to adopt an approach best suited to the scale of the proposal and the data available.

The weekly cost to those employees in receipt of luncheon vouchers will vary depending on the value of the voucher and the level of earnings. On current standard rates, the extra National Insurance liability will be 50 pence a week for an employee receiving a £5 a week luncheon voucher and earning between the lower and upper earnings level. Some employers may choose to meet the costs of their employees' National Insurance contribution liability on vouchers.

Residential Living Allowance

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to equalise the residential living allowance between local authority residential care homes and private residential care homes; and if he will make a statement. [58664]

Angela Eagle: The Government have established an independent Royal Commission to consider the future funding of long-term care and to make recommendations. Issues such as benefit provision for people in long-term care fall within the Royal Commission's deliberations. The Royal Commission will report at the end of the year.

Officials in the Department have been asked to consider whether Residential Allowance is meeting the objectives of community care. This is not a formal review with specific terms of reference, and it is too early to give a commitment on whether, or when changes will be introduced.

Benefit Entitlement

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures his Department plans to introduce to place a responsibility on claimants to report improvements in their medical condition which may affect benefit entitlement. [58572]

Mr. Timms: We want to ensure that disabled people on Incapacity Benefit get the benefits to which they are properly entitled and that they receive the advice they need to help them achieve independence. Equally we want to reinforce the principle that the right to benefit is balanced by responsibilities. Currently many people, once they get Incapacity Benefit, have no further personal contact with their social security office, and often do not realise that changes in their medical condition may affect their benefit entitlement. We intend to make it clear in legislation that improvements are changes that should be reported and will explore ways of keeping in closer contact with claimants to ensure that the information held is up to date.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to exempt carers from the contributions requirement in respect of incapacity benefit. [58578]

Mr. Timms: Carers currently have to pay a minimum amount of National Insurance contributions at some point prior to the claim, in order to qualify for Incapacity Benefit. This will continue to be the case in the future. However, as we made clear in our consultation paper "A New Contract for Welfare: Support for Disabled People" we are planning to modify the proposed new contribution test so that carers who received Invalid Care Allowance are not disadvantaged because they were unable to pay contributions due to their caring responsibilities in one of the two tax years before the claim.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what funds his Department plans to make available for each of the three stages of pilot schemes for the introduction of a single gateway. [58674]

Angela Eagle: Final decisions have still to be taken on the amount of additional resources to be made available to fund the single gateway pilots. Detailed work on costs is still being undertaken. An important reason for piloting the single gateway is to measure costs in order to inform decisions about national implementation.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many examinations for disability living

allowance and incapacity benefit have been processed by the Glasgow office of the Benefits Agency medical services in each of the last 12 months. [58270]

Mr. Timms: The administration of Social Security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 9 November 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many examinations for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB) have been processed by the Glasgow office of the Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS) in each of the last 12 months.

A decision to contract BAMS out to the private sector was announced by the Secretary of State on 31 July 1997. This decision was in line with the Government's commitment to modernising the delivery of Social Security to make it better, simpler, and more efficient. On 19 February it was announced that the BAMS contract had been awarded to the Sema Group for the next five years. They continue to use the Glasgow Medical Services Centre for medical examinations.

Information about the number of DLA and IB examinations carried out at the Glasgow Medical Services Centre is given on the attached table.

Number of DLA/IB examinations performed at the Glasgow Medical Services Centre

Month	*DLA*	*IB*
October 1997	1,635	4,082
November 1997	2,503	4,672
December 1997	1,548	4,388
January 1998	2,108	4,548
February 1998	1,974	4,175
March 1998	1,882	4,879
April 1998	1,274	4,338
May 1998	1,650	3,919
June 1998	1,852	4,521
July 1998	1,609	4,117
August 1998	1,605	3,817
September 1998	1,273	3,628

Note:

Figures are provisional and subject to change

Source:

Figures provided by Medical Services on behalf of Sema Group

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence was evaluated by his Department prior to determining the age limit of three years for the mobility component of disability living allowance. [58569]

Mr. Timms: The Government took account of the views of medical advisers as well as research by the then Office for Population, Censuses and Surveys, by the Disability Alliance and by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children are expected to benefit from the extension of the mobility component of disability living allowance to children of three and four years old; and what estimate he has made of the number who would benefit if it was extended to children below the age of three years and of the cost to his Department of that extension. [58573]

Mr. Timms: 8,000 children a year are expected to benefit from the extension of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to children of the ages of three and four. The cost of extending this to disabled children under three is difficult to estimate given that the current criteria for help is based primarily on an inability or virtual inability to walk, and that all children under three are unable to walk any substantial distances.

Guaranteed Pensioner Income

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people in the Tynemouth constituency who will benefit from the introduction of a guaranteed pensioner income. [59012]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. As at May 1998, there were approximately 8,000 pensioners in receipt of Income Support in the area covered by North Tyneside Local Authority. The above-inflation increase in the Income Support rates, providing a guaranteed minimum income of not less than £75 per week for a single pensioner and £116.60 for a couple, will benefit pensioners entitled to Income Support from April 1999.

Notes:

1. Estimate rounded to the nearest thousand, and based on a 5 per cent sample of Income Support claimants.

2. "Pensioners" are defined for Income Support purposes, as single persons aged 60 or over, or couples (married or unmarried) where one or both members are 60 or over.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 1998.

Income Support

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in receipt of income support in the Warrington, North constituency had weekly deductions paid to *(a)* British Gas and *(b)* North West Water for each of the past five years. [58316]

Angela Eagle: The administration of Income Support is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Helen Jones, dated 9 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Peter Mathison to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in receipt of Income Support in the Warrington North constituency had weekly deductions paid to (a) British Gas and (b) North West Water for each of the past five years. As Mr Mathison is away from the office on leave, I am replying.

The information is not available in the format requested. The Benefits Agency (BA) collate Income Support (IS) statistics by BA District which do not correspond to Parliamentary Constituency boundaries. The BA North Cheshire District with offices at Warrington and Widnes is one such District. Information for this District is shown on the attached table.

It has not been possible to list payments solely to British Gas nor North West Water. Direct payment statistics record a deduction as either "fuel" or "water". No distinction is drawn between gas and electricity suppliers, or between the different water suppliers.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Number of IS recipients in the North Cheshire BA District having weekly deductions for fuel and water 1993–98

Year	Fuel deductions applications accepted	Water deductions applications accepted
1993–94	1,799	1,745
1994–95	1,901	1,922
1995–96	2,117	1,843
1996–97	1,484	1,684
1997–98	1,470	1,097

Notes:

1. A customer may be recorded more than once if their claim to IS ended and they later reclaimed.
2. Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Source:

Figures supplied by the Central Data Unit of BA Banking and Accountancy Branch.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to meet the Disability Benefits Forum to discuss his plans for replacing the Benefit Integrity Programme. [59230]

Mr. Timms: We value the help provided by the Disability Benefits Forum as we take forward our plans to reform disability benefits and we meet them regularly. Yesterday, at our most recent meeting, we discussed the latest position on the Benefit Integrity Project and we announced further administrative improvements in its operation. From 16 November 1998, the Project will no longer contact people receiving the highest rate of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component with either the highest or middle rate of the DLA care component, where the award pre-dates April 1992. Nor will it contact people receiving both components of DLA at the highest rates whose main disabling condition is recorded (on the DLA computer system) as Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Neurological Disease or Mental Subnormality.

Cases in action will be finalised but no new cases will be selected from these groups. This change builds on other improvements that have been made since we inherited this Project which ensure that it operates in a way that is both sensitive and cost-effective. At the same time, we invited the Forum to continue to work with us and officials as we develop a new fairer way of reviewing people's entitlement to DLA, which will replace the Benefit Integrity Project. A special working group will be set up to take this forward.

Lone Parents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of calculating housing benefit and council tax benefit for lone parents using the applicable amounts used for couples. [59156]

Angela Eagle: The estimated cost of calculating Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for lone parents using the applicable amounts used for couples would be £185 million in Housing Benefit and £25 million in Council Tax Benefit.

Notes:

1. Information drawn from the 1995/96 Family Resources Survey, uprated to 1999/2000 prices and benefit levels.
2. Estimated caseloads adjusted using May 1997 administrative data and calibrated in line with the Department's forecasts consistent with the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).
3. Estimates are at 1999/2000 prices and are rounded to the nearest £5 million.
4. The reply assumes that the lone parent rate of the Family Premium will continue for those who qualify for it.

DEFENCE

Head of Defence Export Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the contract of the current Head of Defence Export Services finishes; who his successor will be; and what the salary of the post is. [58963]

Mr. George Robertson: I am announcing today that the Prime Minister has approved the appointment of Mr. Tony Edwards as the next Head of Defence Export Services in succession to Sir Charles Masefield. Mr. Edwards, who will be seconded to the Ministry of Defence from TI Group plc., will formally take up appointment on 14 December 1998 when Sir Charles Masefield, who has been seconded to the Ministry from British Aerospace, will take up a new appointment in industry.

Mr. Edwards will receive a salary from the Ministry of Defence of £165,000 a year plus an annual performance related bonus of up to £15,000. In addition, the Defence Industries Council, acting on behalf of the defence industry as a whole, will provide a top-up element so that Mr. Edwards' basic remuneration package will remain on a par with what he is currently receiving from TI Group plc.

Police and Guard Services

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by rank *(a)* the establishment and *(b)* the current operational strength of (i) the Ministry of Defence Police, (ii) the Military Provost Guard Service and (iii) the Ministry of Defence Guard Service. [58330]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The information requested is shown in the table.

Rank	Complement	Strength
Ministry of Defence Police		
Chief Constable	1	1
Deputy Chief Constable	1	1
Assistant Chief Constable	3	3
Chief Superintendent	2	2
Superintendent	27	28
Chief Inspector	55	55
Inspector	125	123
Sergeant	596	569
Constable	2,979	2,863
Totals	3,789	3,645
Military Provost Guard Service		
SSgt	4	4
Sgt	19	19
Cpl	20	20
LCpl	32	32
Pte	43	38
Totals	118	113

Rank	Complement	Strength
Ministry of Defence Guard Service		
CSO1	4	4
CSO2	14	15
CSO3	82	78
CSO4	562	538
CSO5	3,608	3,424
Totals	4,270	4,059

Notes:
CSO—Civilian Security Officer
All figures are as at 1 November 1998

White Fleet Contracts

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will issue an invitation to negotiate on the white fleet contracts for Scotland, Central, London and Southern regions; and if he will make a statement. [58331]

Mr. Spellar: Invitations to submit proposals for MOD 'white fleet' requirements for the Scotland, Central Britain, London and Southern projects are expected to be issued shortly.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the target dates for the award of white fleet contracts outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [58332]

Mr. Spellar: The target date for contract award of the Scotland, Central Britain, London and Southern 'white fleet' contracts is August 1999. That for the South Western project is December 1999.

Challenger II Tanks

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the contracts will be awarded in respect of the new transporters for the Challenger II tanks; and if he will make a statement. [58333]

Mr. Spellar: We are currently considering industry's proposals for this programme and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Mechanical Handling Equipment

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will let the contract for tri-service mechanical handling equipment; and if he will make a statement. [58334]

Mr. Spellar: If a PFI solution is adopted it is estimated that a contract will be awarded in February 2000.

Military Bands

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military bands each of the armed services had in *(a)* May 1979 and *(b)* May 1997; how many each has at the present time; and what proposals he has to alter the number. [57174]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The number of bands of the Armed Forces, in each of the years specified, is as follows:

	May 1979	May 1997	October 1998
Royal Navy	9	5	5
Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve	0	0	0
Army	[1]79	30	30
Territorial Army	24	24	24
Royal Air Force	5	4	3
Royal Auxiliary Air Force	0	0	0

[1] This figure is based on a study undertaken in 1981, but is believed to be representative of the number of bands which existed in May 1979.

We have no plans to alter the present number of regular Service bands.

Military Bases (Land Quality)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those occupied and unoccupied sites of military bases that his Department has identified as areas of environmental concern, indicating the principle causes of environmental problems on those sites; and if he will place copies of the relevant land quality statements in the Library. [56295]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The need for more information on the extent to which the Defence Estate might have been contaminated through being used for military purposes was recognised, and a programme of Land Quality Assessments was initiated in 1996. The scope of this programme is extensive and, given the capacity of specialist firms to undertake this work, it is estimated that this programme could take up to 10 years to complete. Accordingly, effort is being concentrated in the first instance on those sites allocated for disposal.

The provision of LQAs is the responsibility of the unit or organisation occupying the site. No central record of these documents has been maintained. However, arrangements are now being put in place to ensure that the Defence Estate Organisation will, in future, receive copies of all LQAs produced.

At any one time, there are approximately 400 sites in disposal, many of them very small and handled by local offices. It would not be practical to put a copy of every land quality statement in the Library of the House; statements related to specific sites, could, however, by made available on request.

Territorial Army

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the consultation document on the restructuring of the TA was first made available to the TA command; and on what date it was first made available to the Secretary of State for Scotland. [59239]

Mr. George Robertson: Initial proposals on the restructuring of the TA were first circulated internally within the Army chain of command and to Territorial, Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations on 21 July; and were subsequently provided to officials of the Scottish Office on 20 August.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland concerning the proposed disposition of TA infantry and engineering units in Scotland. [59238]

Mr. George Robertson: I have discussed the proposals for the TA in Scotland with the Secretary of State for Scotland on a number of occasions as they have developed.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions he has had with other Ministers concerning the anticipated role of the Territorial Army in contingency planning for the millennium bug; [59235]

(2) what assessment he has made of the potential role for Territorial Army units in cases of civil emergency as a result of the millennium bug. [59236]

Mr. George Robertson: My Ministerial colleagues and I have participated fully in the Government's work in addressing the Year 2000 problem. Long-standing arrangements exist under which local authorities can request military assistance, whether from the regular or the volunteer forces, in the event of a civil emergency. As yet, we have received no requests which would indicate any major requirement for military assistance to the civil authorities over the millennium period.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision he has made for availability of Territorial Army or regular army units in the north of Scotland in case of civil emergency as a result of the millennium bug. [59237]

Mr. George Robertson: The arrangements for providing military assistance in the event of civil emergency are long standing, well understood by local authorities and apply to the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he will announce his proposals for the restructuring of the Territorial Army. [59240]

Mr. George Robertson: I hope to do so next week.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to retain a TA engineering presence in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the Highlands. [59241]

Mr. George Robertson: This will be subject to decisions on the future structure of the Territorial Army as a whole, on which I hope to make an announcement next week.

HEALTH

Long-term Care

16. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of long-term care. [57365]

Mr. Hutton: The report of the Royal Commission on Long-term Care is due at the turn of the year. Other publications in the coming months include the Social Services White Paper and the Long Term Care Charter.

NHS (Best Practice)

17. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to identify and spread best practice in the NHS. [57366]

Mr. Milburn: We are taking positive action to disseminate best practice throughout the National Health Service, including establishing the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and a database of good practice on the National Health Service web. We are making available £10 million a year to identify and promote 100 beacon local health services. And we are abolishing the internal market which created such obstacles to sharing best practice in the NHS.

NHS Direct

18. **Jacqui Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for extending NHS Direct in the west midlands. [57367]

Mr. Milburn: We will be extending NHS Direct to cover the Black Country from the beginning of January 1999 and Birmingham from April 1999.

22. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of people to be covered by NHS Direct by April 1999. [57372]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), *Official Report*, column 140.

Chiropody Services

19. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to improve the provision of chiropody services in East Sussex. [57368]

Mr. Hutton: Provision of chiropody services is a matter for the health authority. The hon. Member will be pleased to know that the targeting of resources on those with clinical need has reduced podiatry waiting lists from 14 to 2 weeks and resources have been released for other county-wide priorities such as cancer care.

Acute Beds

20. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to identify the number and use of acute beds in the NHS. [57369]

Ms Jowell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), *Official Report*, column 141.

Free Eye Tests

21. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of senior citizens who are eligible to benefit from free eye tests. [57371]

Mr. Milburn: We estimate that, from 1 April 1999, some 7 million more people aged 60 and over will become eligible for free National Health Service sight tests.

Global Warming (Health Effects)

23. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies he has made of the effects of global warming on health. [57373]

Ms Jowell: The Government, through the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), support research on the global impacts of climate change on human health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The Department of Health itself has

not yet commissioned any studies directly related to the effects of global warming on health. However since the Climate Change Impacts Review group of the DETR identified possible health effects we are in discussion about research areas with the Environmental Change Unit at the University of Oxford.

NHS Resources

24. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effect of the availability of resources on (i) nurses' and midwives' pay and (ii) the rationing of drugs or procedures in the health service. [57374]

Mr. Milburn: The Comprehensive Spending Review produced a settlement which can accommodate fair pay rises for nurses and midwives and will ensure that cost effective drugs and procedures are available in the National Health Service. The Government are determined to ensure that patients receive the full benefit of this new investment so pay review bodies will need to strike a careful balance between fairness and affordability.

Breast Screening

25. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the value for money of the breast screening programme. [57375]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service Breast Screening Programme is based on the recommendations of the 1987 Forrest report. This report included an economic appraisal of the costs and benefits of breast screening, including a comparison against other health service activities.

Over one million women aged 50–64 are screened each year in England at a cost of around £35 million. In 1996–7 over 6,500 cases of cancer were detected.

Booked Admissions

26. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to promote booked admission pilots in the NHS. [57376]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster), *Official Report*, column 137.

32. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to promote booked admission pilots in the NHS. [57382]

Mr. Milburn: On 29 September 1998, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced that 24 sites had been selected to pilot innovative systems to enable patients to book hospital admission dates convenient to them. £5 million has been made available this year, with £20 million next year to enable the programme to be extended.

Children's Services

28. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on special grants for children's services and their relationship with "Quality Protects" action plans. [57378]

Mr. Hutton: On 5 November, we published the Government response to the report of the Children's Safeguards Review. This set out our plans for a new children's services special grant, which will amount to £375 million over three years, and its link to our "Quality Protects" programme. We shall be publishing, later this week, a circular to all local authorities, copied to National Health Service bodies and the voluntary sector, giving them further information about the special grant and its relationship with Quality Protects action plans.

Acheson Report

29. **Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to take in response to Sir Donald Acheson's report on the causes of health inequalities. [57379]

Ms Jowell: Sir Donald's report will be published shortly.

The Government are committed to taking action to redress the effects of health inequalities. This is one of the key aims of the Green Paper "Our Healthier Nation", published in February this year. Action is already being taken through a broad range of Government initiatives, notably the Social Exclusion Unit's report "Bringing Britain Together". Cutting health inequalities is one of the top priorities for local health and social services, as identified in "Modernising Health and Social Services: National Priorities Guidance 1999/2000–2001/02", issued recently. Early next year we will publish our White Paper on a health strategy for England with further proposals for action.

Health Visiting

30. **Ms McCafferty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to promote health visiting in the NHS. [57380]

Mr. Milburn: On 22 October my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health announced that an Innovation Fund of up to £1 million will be set up to explore new ways of working, new partnerships and new roles for health visitors. The health visitor will be key to delivering "Our Healthier Nation" objectives.

Heart Attacks

31. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to shorten the average time taken to deliver treatment to victims of heart attacks. [57381]

Mr. Milburn: The Department has introduced various initiatives to reduce the time taken to treat people who have heart attacks. There is now considerable evidence that delays in providing emergency treatment have been reduced and more patients are receiving early thrombolytic therapy.

However, more remains to be done. This is why the first National Service Framework on coronary heart disease includes the management of heart attack. The Emerging Findings Report, which will be published shortly, contains draft standards which include the pre-hospital care of people who suffer heart attacks as well as emergency treatment in hospital.

Out-patient Consultations

33. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people awaiting out-patient consultations on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 1998. [57383]

Mr. Milburn: Information is not collected centrally in the form requested. Available data on outpatient appointments are collected and published quarterly in a statistical bulletin. Copies are available in the Library.

Accident and Emergency Departments

34. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve conditions for patients and staff in accident and emergency departments. [57384]

Mr. Hutton: As part of the National Health Service Modernisation Fund, the Government have announced an extra £30 million to modernise Accident and Emergency Departments next year.

Hip Replacements

35. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the reduction of the waiting lists for hip replacements; and if he will make a statement. [57385]

Mr. Milburn: Information on waiting lists for individual procedures is not available nationally. However, the £417 million additional resources made available this year will enable the National Health Service to make progress in tackling waiting lists for hip replacements.

Metal-based Amalgams

36. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has undertaken to evaluate the risks involved in using metal-based amalgams in dentistry; and if he will make a statement. [57386]

Mr. Milburn: Two projects have been commissioned this year. These are a pilot study of the incidence of adverse reactions associated with dental materials and a study of neuropsychological functioning of dentists exposed to chronic low levels of mercury.

Hospital Beds (National Inquiry)

37. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the national inquiry into hospital beds, which he announced on 30 September. [57387]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 30 September 1998 the establishment of a national inquiry into hospital beds. The findings of that inquiry will be published next Spring.

Waiting List (Orthopaedics)

38. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the waiting list size for orthopaedic consultants nationally relative to the average waiting list size for all NHS consultants. [57388]

Mr. Milburn: At the end of June 1998, the number of patients waiting for elective admission to trauma and orthopaedics was 254,470. This represents 20 per cent. of the total list.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the investment he is making to reduce NHS waiting lists over the next three years. [57377]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham), *Official Report*, column 133.

Midwives

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of midwives are on *(a)* D, *(b)* E and *(c)* F grades (i) nationally and (ii) by region for each of the last five years. [56929]

Mr. Milburn: The table shows the percentage of registered midwives in the National Health Service in England for the years 1993 and 1994, broken down according to grade and region. Figures are not available for 1995–97 as the Department's non-medical workforce census, the source of this statistic, does not collect information by clinical grade. In addition, the NHS Executive has gathered information from trusts about how the grading guidance is being applied to midwives.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): nursing and midwifery staff working in the registered midwifery area of work, as a proportion of Registered Midwives by grade and by region, in England, as at 30 September for each year

Percentage

	1993			*1994*		
	Grade D	*Grade E*	*Grade F*	*Grade D*	*Grade E*	*Grade F*
England	1.1	35.1	17.4	1.1	36.4	18.8
Northern	6.8	39.9	13.9	3.1	46.5	14.5
Yorkshire	0.8	44.4	10.9	0.5	44.0	15.2
Trent	0.4	33.8	13.3	0.5	34.2	14.4
East Anglia	0.2	33.9	14.6	0.5	38.6	14.1
North West Thames	0.8	30.5	25.9	1.1	28.7	28.3
North East Thames	0.3	25.1	25.4	0.3	26.7	28.3
South East Thames	1.0	28.7	19.7	1.3	28.9	22.1
South West Thames	1.3	32.5	21.7	1.0	32.1	22.6
Wessex	0.3	36.3	18.2	2.8	36.0	18.5
Oxford	1.0	35.9	10.8	2.6	34.6	13.7
South Western	1.2	37.2	15.0	0.5	39.0	15.9

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): nursing and midwifery staff working in the registered midwifery area of work, as a proportion of Registered Midwives by grade and by region, in England, as at 30 September for each year

Percentage

	1993			1994		
	Grade D	*Grade E*	*Grade F*	*Grade D*	*Grade E*	*Grade F*
West Midlands	0.7	29.9	22.4	0.8	32.6	22.7
Mersey	0.1	42.3	14.2	0.5	44.2	15.3
North Western	0.9	41.1	15.9	0.9	43.3	15.3
Others	4.7	31.4	5.7	0.0	22.4	16.8

Notes:
Percentages were calculated using whole-time equivalents
Figures exclude learners and agency staff
Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Palliative Care

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of demand over the next five years for *(a)* in-patient, and *(b)* respite and day care provision for palliative care; and if he will make a statement. [58178]

Mr. Hutton: In Executive Letter (95)22 regional health authorities were asked to ensure that health authorities should agree service contracts for specialist palliative care to meet the needs of their resident populations. This was followed by Executive Letter (96)85 which gave further advice on epidemiologically based needs assessment for palliative and terminal care.

We are committed to ensuring that the principles and practice of palliative care are adopted in the care of all people with life threatening illnesses in all settings. Significant advances have been made in pain and symptom control and there is greater emphasis on maximising the quality of life of patients.

In June this year we issued Health Service Circular 1998/115 pointing out the need to integrate the principles and practice of palliative care for all those facing life threatening illnesses into the whole of National Health Service practice. To support this, with the circular the Government also circulated three documents published by the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services which provide guidance on key issues facing those who are dying and those caring for them in the NHS. These were:

(i) Guidelines for Managing Cancer Pain in Adults

(ii) Changing Gear—Guidelines for Managing the Last Days of Life in Adults

(iii) Palliative Care in the Hospital Setting.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review inspection and registration standards for nursing homes; and if he will make a statement. [58181]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to reforming current regulatory arrangements for social services, including nursing homes, to create independent arrangements that are tough, transparent and accountable. As part of this process we are aiming to develop national required standards to ensure greater consistency in the work of the different regulation authorities. Details of our reforms will be included in the Social Services White Paper to be published shortly.

Cervical Screening

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *975–76*, for what reasons health authorities in England are unable to report average time taken for patients to receive results of cervical smear tests: and how methods of data collection on waiting times for cervical smear tests in English health authorities differ from those in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland. [57869]

Mr. Hutton: None of the four health departments routinely collect information about the length of time women wait for the results of their cervical smear tests. However, information on the length of time laboratories take to read smear tests was collected centrally in England until March 1997.

As the Welsh Office have only five health authorities, and Northern Ireland Office only four health boards, both Departments were able to collect information about waiting times for smear results on an ad hoc basis. The Scottish Office were also able to contact each of their 11 health boards, but provided information only on reporting times. As there are over 100 health authorities in England the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information about waiting times for results will be included as part of the current review of data collection on the cervical screening programme.

Joint Procedures (NHS and Personal Social Services)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations took place with users and carers and their representative organisations when drawing up the Joint Procedures Guidance for the NHS and Personal Social Services. [57785]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* No formal consultation was undertaken with any organisations before the publication of "Modernising Health and Social Services: National Priorities Guidance 1999–2000–2001–02".

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue further guidance to the Medicines Control Agency about the classification of products containing blends of herbal, vitamin and mineral

supplements; and if it is his policy that dietary supplements should be available on general retail sale provided that they are safe. [58731]

Ms Jowell: The Medicines Control Agency acts on behalf of the Licensing Authority in accordance with Medicines Act 1968. The Agency classifies products on a case by case basis in accordance with European Community and United Kingdom law, legal precedent and published guidance, and there are no plans to change this. Whether a product is subject to food or medicine legislation is a matter of law not policy. Products which are not medicinal products and fall within the definition of food must comply with the law relating to food. Amongst other things, this effectively requires that products are safe.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if a product containing a blend of herbal, vitamin and mineral supplements may require a medicine's product licence in cases where different elements of that blend could each be sold separately without such a licence. [58536]

Ms Jowell: A product containing a blend of herbs, vitamins and minerals whose different elements could be sold separately under food law is not considered a medicinal product by the Medicines Control Agency, unless it is presented for treating or preventing disease or it may be administered with a view to restoring, correcting or modifying physiological functions in humans. However, where a herbal product—whether or not it includes non-herbal substances—is classified as a medicinal product it will be subject to medicines legislation. Herbal remedies, accordingly, require a marketing authorisation (product licence) unless they are exempt from licensing under the terms of Section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968. Section 132 of the Act makes it clear that the exemption for herbal remedies does not extend to products which contain active non-herbal substances.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used by the Medicines Control Agency in classifying a blend of herbal, vitamin and mineral supplements as a medicine; whether the criteria include the availability of the product on general retail sale in other states in the European Union; and if it is the practice of the Agency to provide manufacturers of such blends with a statement of the reasons for so classifying a product. [58537]

Ms Jowell: In assessing whether a product is a medicine, the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) has regard to the definition of a medicinal product found in Pharmaceutical Directive 65/65/EEC. It also has regard to legal precedent, and its guidance, (including assessment criteria), which it has published in its leaflet Medicines Act Leaflet 8: "A guide to what is a medicinal product". On a case by case basis, the MCA decides whether a product is presented for treating or preventing disease, or may be administered with a view to restoring, correcting or modifying physiological functions in humans. If either or both, the product is a medicine. The MCA does regard a product's status in other member states as a relevant factor when coming to a decision on its classification in the United Kingdom.

When notifying a manufacturer that it has classified a product as a medicinal product, the MCA explains the grounds for its decision.

Dementia

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the future levels of demand for respite provision for those caring for people with dementia; and what policies he has in place to meet that demand. [58571]

Mr. Hutton: The Royal Commission on Long-term Care of the Elderly has been asked, in its terms of reference, to have regard to the number of people likely to require various kinds of long-term care in the future. The National Carers Strategy will draw together existing work within Government that impacts on carers, assess whether any of their key needs have been overlooked and set out an integrated strategy for future action by Government.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of research funded by his Department into ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has been carried out by psychologists and psychiatrists. [58742]

Ms Jowell: Management of much of the research supported by the National Health Service research and development levy is devolved and details are not collected routinely by the Department. Information which is available centrally shows that the NHS R&D Programme has been funding a research project entitled "Should GPs manage chronic fatigue syndrome? A controlled trial", which has now reported. The lead researcher for this project was a General Practitioner. Further work is about to be commissioned through competitive tender on the topic of "Management Strategies for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome".

The Medical Research Council funded one study in relation to myalgic encephalomyelitis which has recently been completed. The work was undertaken at the University of Manchester and the project was entitled "The role of noradrenaline in the neuropsychological pathogenesis of the chronic fatigue syndrome". This project was led by a psychiatrist.

Health Authorities (Revenue Allocations)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce the 1999–2000 revenue allocations for health authorities. [59480]

Mr. Dobson: The 1999–2000 unified revenue allocations for health authorities are given in the table. Unified allocations cover spending on hospital and community health services, general medical services (cash limited) and prescribing.

1999–2000 Health authority total allocations

	£000	Percentage cash increase
Avon	582,510	6.69
Barking and Havering	256,500	6.60
Barnet	209,057	6.58
Barnsley	156,588	7.85
Bedfordshire	312,909	7.47
Berkshire	431,001	7.38
Bexley and Greenwich	289,039	5.45
Birmingham	681,946	6.50
Bradford	312,469	7.25

1999–2000 Health authority total allocations

	£000	Percentage cash increase
Brent and Harrow	310,879	5.79
Bromley	183,609	6.49
Buckinghamshire	368,084	7.15
Bury and Rochdale	249,286	7.09
Calderdale and Kirklees	369,439	6.67
Cambridge and Huntingdon	233,706	6.70
Camden and Islington	320,971	7.04
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	317,079	5.80
County Durham	411,001	7.09
Coventry	200,882	7.28
Croydon	202,682	6.72
Doncaster	198,465	7.04
Dorset	446,631	5.49
Dudley	183,018	6.66
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	475,900	6.67
East and North Hertfordshire	290,037	6.59
East Kent	395,915	6.36
East Lancashire	349,892	6.57
East London and the City	491,634	8.12
East Norfolk	380,037	6.41
East Riding	360,233	6.92
East Surrey	244,052	5.49
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	505,366	6.35
Enfield and Haringey	323,495	6.72
Gateshead and South Tyneside	255,537	6.95
Gloucestershire	334,591	5.47
Herefordshire	98,713	6.45
Hillingdon	154,353	6.46
Isle of Wight	92,390	5.96
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	286,339	8.71
Kingston and Richmond	208,380	5.51
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	573,116	7.11
Leeds	469,356	6.80
Leicestershire	517,887	7.15
Lincolnshire	394,990	6.42
Liverpool	350,296	6.87
Manchester	349,914	6.00
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	422,995	6.35
Morecambe Bay	205,730	5.46
Newcastle and North Tyneside	333,829	6.92
North and East Devon	300,720	5.50
North and Mid Hampshire	291,934	6.39
North Cheshire	201,585	5.49
North Cumbria	198,917	6.78
North Derbyshire	228,364	6.47
North Essex	503,561	6.57
North Nottinghamshire	236,475	6.71
North Staffordshire	304,458	7.32
North West Anglia	250,526	6.86
North West Lancashire	321,635	6.51
North Yorkshire	434,879	6.51
Northamptonshire	326,245	6.40
Northumberland	196,638	6.81
Nottingham	391,712	7.40
Oxfordshire	327,812	7.39
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	330,353	6.65
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	296,944	5.46
Rotherham	159,696	7.27
Salford and Trafford	310,166	6.72
Sandwell	205,838	7.35
Sefton	192,610	6.73
Sheffield	367,283	6.88
Shropshire	247,650	6.51
Solihull	122,698	6.82
Somerset	290,097	6.40
South and West Devon	383,565	5.63
South Cheshire	405,696	6.42
South Derbyshire	340,745	6.90
South Essex	417,802	7.24
South Humber	199,138	5.47
South Lancashire	185,797	5.49
South Staffordshire	322,868	6.41

1999–2000 Health authority total allocations

	£000	Percentage cash increase
Southampton and South West Hampshire	327,774	6.58
St. Helen's and Knowsley	237,210	6.88
Stockport	176,374	6.68
Suffolk	397,601	5.49
Sunderland	201,223	6.97
Tees	370,553	7.02
Wakefield	211,891	6.81
Walsall	163,794	7.37
Warwickshire	293,422	5.49
West Hertfordshire	317,538	6.38
West Kent	562,935	6.41
West Pennine	297,286	6.80
West Surrey	371,000	5.48
West Sussex	467,090	6.59
Wigan and Bolton	373,322	7.18
Wiltshire	345,684	6.37
Wirral	226,913	6.70
Wolverhampton	160,766	7.15
Worcestershire	303,405	6.37
England	31,192,915	6.60

Pay Review Bodies

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the terms of reference of the doctors' and dentists' and the nurses' review bodies. [59481]

Mr. Milburn: Earlier this year, I set out proposed terms of reference for the Doctors and Dentists Review Body (DDRB) and the Nurses, Midwives and Professions Allied to Medicine Review Body (NPRB). The Government have listened very carefully to the points made in consultation. As a result, we have been able to finalise the terms of reference. These are set out as follows.

Doctors and Dentists Review Body: Terms of Reference

The Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' remuneration is independent. Its role is to make recommendations to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Health, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales on the remuneration of doctors and dentists taking any part in the NHS.

In reaching its recommendations, the Review Body is to have regard to the following considerations:

the need to recruit, retain and motivate doctors and dentists;

the Health Departments' output targets for the delivery of services, as set out by the Government;

the funds available to the Health Departments as set out in the Government's Departmental Expenditure Limits;

the Government's inflation target.

The Review Body may also be asked to consider other specific issues.

The Review Body is also required to take careful account of the economic and other evidence submitted by the Government, staff and professional representatives and others.

Reports and recommendations should be submitted jointly to the Secretary of State for Health, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Prime Minister.

Nurses, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professionals Allied to Medicine Review Bodies: Terms of Reference

The Review Body on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine (NPRB) remuneration is independent. Its role is to make recommendations to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Health, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales on the remuneration of

(i) Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors employed in the NHS;

(ii) Physiotherapists, Radiographers, Remedial Gymnasts, Occupational Therapists, Orthoptists, Chiropodists, Dietitians and related grades employed in the NHS.

In reaching its recommendations, the Review Body is to have regard to the following considerations:

the need to recruit, retain and motivate nurses, midwives, health visitors and staff in the Professions Allied to Medicine;

the Health Departments' output targets for the delivery of services, as set out by the Government;

the funds available to the Health Departments as set out in the Government's Departmental Expenditure Limits;

the Government's inflation target.

The Review Body may also be asked to consider other specific issues.

The Review Body is also required to take careful account of the economic and other evidence submitted by the Government, staff and professional representatives and others.

Reports and recommendations should be submitted jointly to the Secretary of State for Health, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Prime Minister.

Pharmacists' Bills

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what sum is currently owed on bills submitted by pharmacists to the Government; [58757]

(2) what the average length of time taken is for the Government to pay bills submitted by pharmacists. [58758]

Mr. Milburn: Pharmacies do not submit bills to the National Health Service for payment. Instead they submit prescription forms to the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) for pricing and payment in accordance with established procedures. Prescriptions may be dispensed at any time during a particular calender month. At the end of the month, prescriptions are batched and sent to the PPA for interpretation and the calculation of the payment due. Some 80 per cent. of the estimated sum due is paid at the end of the month in which the prescriptions are received, with an adjusted balance, paid at the end of the following month. Each month on average over £380 million is paid to pharmacies.

Car Park Charges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further guidance he has issued to health authorities and trusts concerning the levying of charges for car parking for staff and visitors. [59245]

Mr. Milburn: A guide to the implementation of car parking charges was issued in January 1996. Copies are available in the Library. No further guidance is planned.

Children's Services Grant

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for payment of the Children's Services Grant after 2001–02. [59226]

Mr. Hutton: We will review the future of the Children's Services Grant in 2000, as part of the overall review of the Government's spending plans.

Surgical Instruments (Sterilisation)

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* instruction or *(b)* guidelines his Department has (i) issued and (ii) intends to issue to require hospitals to amend the sterilisation procedure for surgical instruments in respect of *(a)* the temperature and *(b)* the duration of the autoclave cycle. [59155]

Ms Jowell: The Department issued guidance on hospital sterilization in "Health Technical Memorandum 2010" and in "Guidance on Decontamination". Copies are available in the Library.

In addition, updated and extended advice was issued in April 1998 by The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens and The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on handling surgical instruments used on patients known to have, or suspected of having, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD). Having taken into account the available scientific evidence on both CJD and non variant CJD, this revised guidance recommends disposal of all instruments used on patients with clinical symptoms of any type of CJD. This advice also recommends temperatures and autoclave cycle durations appropriate for use in decontamination processes in certain other situations.

The advice is kept under constant review.

School Nurses and Health Visitors

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Minister of State's recent letter to North Thames and South Thames health authorities regarding school nurses and health visitors. [58737]

Mr. Milburn: The Department recently conducted a national survey in line with its agenda in relation to school nurses and health visitors which showed no uniform planned reduction in community nursing staff.

As a result of this survey my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health wrote on 19 October to the regional chairmen of those regions proposing reductions (which included North and South Thames) asking that they discuss with the relevant health authorities the reasons for, and the nature of, the reductions. Regional chairmen in North and South Thames in conjunction with the regional directors of nursing have contacted the relevant health authority chief executives to discuss the issues raised by my right hon. Friend's letter.

Waiting Times

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of typical waiting times between GP referrals and NHS consultant appointments. [57370]

Mr. Milburn: Data on waiting times for outpatient appointments in England are collected and published quarterly. Figures for the quarter ended 30 June 1998 showed that 96 per cent. of patients attending first out-patient appointments had waited under 26 weeks since

general practitioner written referral, 82 per cent. had waited under 13 weeks and 38 per cent. had waited under 4 weeks.

Maternity Unit (Maldon)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reach a decision on the appeal by Mid Essex Community Health Council against the proposed closure of the maternity unit at St. Peter's Hospital, Maldon. [59271]

Mr. Milburn: We will announce our decision when we have given full and proper consideration to the proposals.

Hospital Unit Closures

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appeals by community health councils against proposals to close hospital units are currently awaiting determination by him. [59273]

Mr. Milburn: There are eight contested proposals currently with Ministers.

Women's Issues

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a report on the progress made on issues affecting women since May 1997. [59446]

Ms Jowell: We have published our report, "Delivering for women: Progress so far". This charts what has been achieved in the first 18 months of this Government to improve the lives of women. Copies of this report have been placed in the Library of the House, together with two research documents, "Researching Women's Attitudes" and "Tackling Violence Against Women", and it summarises reported action already taken by local authorities to protect women from violence. In addition the right hon. the Baroness Jay has, together with her right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, issued new guidelines on Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment to relevant officials throughout government. Copies of this have also been placed in the library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 November 1998

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Government Property Lawyers

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 14 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 683–84, concerning the Quinquennial Review of Government Property Lawyers, if he is able to report on the outcome of that review. [59646]

The Attorney-General: I am able to report that, following an evaluation of Government Property Lawyers and a further Prior Options Study, I have concluded that against the background of a declining work load the business of the GPL Agency has become non-viable and is likely to remain so and there is no longer a requirement to maintain a central conveyancing function in the public sector. Accordingly, the Government Property Lawyers Agency will close by 30 September 1999. I recognise that this announcement will come as a disappointment to the staff of the GPL. I should like, however, to pay tribute to their hard work and their commitment to the agency over the years.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Swanwick

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the steps taken to establish that no conflict of interest arose as a result of the Chairman of the DERA audit of Swanwick being also Chairman of EHI and Megitt. [58220]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* Before his appointment in June as Chairman of the DERA Audit, Sir Donald Spiers told my Department about those companies with which he was then involved and which had a connection with Lockheed Martin, namely EHI and Meggitt.

EHI is a trading company concerned with the provision of the EH101 helicopter. The MOD selected this helicopter for a Royal Navy role, and then separately selected Lockheed Martin to provide systems for it. Meggitt has a contract to supply military aircraft parts to a different part of the Lockheed Martin organisation from that which is working on the Swanwick centre.

We have also examined Sir Donald's involvement with Siemens Plessey Electronic Systems (SPES). Sir Donald ceased to be a non-executive director of SPES some two months before undertaking the DERA audit, and was unaware of the links between SPES and Lockheed Martin since he was concerned only with the defence interests of SPES.

We are satisfied that these links do not give rise to a conflict of interest with Sir Donald's chairmanship of the DERA audit.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of single regeneration budget money was given to schemes in seaside towns in each of the previous four SRB rounds. [58783]

Mr. Meale: As SRB funding is allocated to comprehensive schemes which may cover whole local authority districts or even counties, rather than specific towns within these areas, precise figures for the funding given to schemes in seaside towns are difficult to produce. However, of the total resources allocated under Rounds 1–3 of the Single Regeneration Budget, 4 per cent. (or £126.5 million) was targeted on schemes in 35 local authority districts classified as 'resort, retirement and port areas' by the 1991 Office for National Statistics (ONS) classification of districts. In SRB Round 4 a further £9.2 million, or 2.9 per cent. of the total, was allocated to schemes in the 'resort, retirement and port' category of the 1991 ONS classification.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. [58789]

Mr. Meale: Proposals for improving the protection afforded to Sites of Special Interest (SSSI) are currently under consideration. Also, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee is reviewing the rationale behind the listing of threatened species on the Schedules associated with the Act. If appropriate, specific proposals for amending the Act will be put forward.

Airport Security Alerts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many security alerts have occurred at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Stansted airports in each of the last three years. [58740]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of security alerts reported to the Department which involved the closure of all or part of the airport or pro-active response by the police, security staff or explosives officers is as follows:

	1996	*1997*	*1998 (to end of October)*
Heathrow	21	23	13
Gatwick	13	16	2
Stansted	3	3	2

Railfreight Link

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if his Department will give Government grant towards the proposed piggyback railfreight project to link the West Coast Main Line with mainland Europe. [58966]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Full grade piggyback would need considerable investment in infrastructure improvements and significant Government grant support. Railtrack has been in discussion with DETR officials for many months about the scheme.

Ministers are aware of recent press speculation that Railtrack is minded not to got through with the scheme and instead to propose an alternative freight upgrade to a smaller gauge but over more of the network. We have yet to receive a grant application from Railtrack. Any such application will be treated on its merits.

Red Fox

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the density of the red fox per square kilometre in each region of Great Britain. [59040]

Mr. Meale: Information in this form is not available.

The latest estimate (1994) for Great Britain of a total pre-breeding population was about 240,000. These comprised 195,000 in England, 23,000 in Scotland and 22,000 in Wales.

Sellafield

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the recent Environment Agency proposed decision concerning the MOX plant at Sellafield. [58780]

Mr. Meale: The Agency's draft determination was received in my Department on 2 November. Requests have been made to Ministers to call in the application for their own determination. These requests are being considered carefully and my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will announce their decision as soon as they are able to do so.

Cetaceans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of the importance of the waters of the Atlantic Frontier as a habitat for whales and dolphins. [59020]

Mr. Meale: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee has carried out surveys for cetaceans in this area since 1985. The data point to these waters as being important in a UK context for large whales.

Welsh Highland Railway

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposed Welsh Highland Railway Order. [59307]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The public local inquiry into the application by the Ffestiniog Railway for this Order close on 28 January. The inquiry Inspector's report is being considered by the Secretary of State. A decision will be made as soon as possible.

Water Supply (Parasites)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals his Department has to protect the United Kingdom's water supply from being infected by parasites which are resistant to current water treatment process. [58714]

Mr. Meale: Water companies in England and Wales are under a duty to supply only drinking water that is wholesome. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland are answerable for similar provisions relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

My right hon. Friends the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Public Health announced on 3 November 1998 that the Government have accepted in full the recommendations of the Expert Group, chaired by Professor Ian Bouchier, on *Cryptosporidium* in Water Supplies. These recommendations were drawn up following a thorough review of the measures necessary to protect drinking water supplies against contamination by the *Cryptosporidium* parasite and we expect water companies and other authorities to implement them. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment also confirmed his intention to make Regulations in England and Wales that will ensure that water companies take proper precautions against *Cryptosporidium* contamination.

Emissions (Kyoto Summit)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to introduce measures to ensure that the emission levels agreed at the Kyoto summit are achieved. [58717]

Mr. Meacher: On 26 October the UK became one of the first developed countries to launch a consultation paper on policy options for meeting its Kyoto commitment. The paper lists the steps the Government have already taken to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases and sets out in detail further options. It demonstrates that the UK is well placed to meet both its legally binding Kyoto target to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012 and the domestic goal of a 20 per cent. cut in CO_2 emissions by 2010. Following the consultation exercise, we shall develop a new climate change programme in good time for ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

Drinking Water

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the different sources of drinking water used in the United Kingdom; and what proportion each source contributes to the annual water supply. [58841]

Mr. Meale: In England and Wales about one third of drinking water is taken from groundwater sources; one third from upland surface water sources, such as reservoirs, lakes, impoundments and streams; and one third from lowland river sources, direct, or via short term bankside storage or long term storage reservoirs. There are, however, considerable variations in these proportions

across the country. The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Railtrack

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with Railtrack about its moratorium on spending on its track and signalling renewal programme. [58843]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Railtrack has assured the Department that there is no such moratorium. Railtrack's Network Management Statement sets out the company's expenditure forecasts for track and signalling renewal—£340 million and £200 million respectively for 1998–99 (1997–98 prices)—and the Government expect Railtrack to meet these targets.

Economic Instruments for Water Pollution

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many responses he received to his consultation document, "Economic Instruments for Water Pollution"; if he will list the respondents; and what arrangements exist for the responses to be viewed. [58967]

Mr. Meale: 134 organisations responded to the consultation paper "Economic Instruments for Water Pollution". I have placed a list of these in the Library of the House. Responses were also received from 26 individuals. These responses, except those from organisations or individuals who asked for their comments not to be made public, are available to be viewed through the library of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Maritime Services (Charges)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to issue a consultation paper on a policy for charging for maritime services currently provided free by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [59092]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Within Government, we are currently undertaking a review of policy on charging for maritime services and infrastructure. If we decide to propose new initiatives we shall consult publicly before taking any final decisions.

Shared Ownership

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has any plans to continue the Do-It-Yourself shared ownership scheme. [59553]

Ms Armstrong: I announced plans on 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *417*, to replace Do-It-Yourself Shared Ownership (DIYSO) and the Tenants Incentive Scheme (TIS) with Homebuy. The Housing Corporation has since been consulting on proposals for the new scheme.

I have received representations that some potential DIYSO purchasers will be unable to afford Homebuy in certain areas. To reflect these concerns I have decided that local authorities should continue to have the option to offer DIYSO through the Local Authority Social Housing Grant mechanism, initially for a further two years, after which I will review the position.

I believe that there is a strong case for rationalising the home ownership schemes funded through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP). Local priorities are likely to result in a higher proportion of the ADP being allocated to rental schemes. With a smaller home ownership programme it makes sense to concentrate resources on a smaller range of schemes which will be simpler for tenants to understand and for landlords to administer.

The Housing Corporation's conventional shared ownership scheme will continue to be available in its present form. This provides opportunities for low cost home ownership and encourages the development of housing schemes with a mix of tenures.

We remain fully committed to promoting sustainable home ownership. I am confident that the schemes provided through the Housing Corporation will continue to make an effective contribution to this objective.

Groundwater

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to protect groundwater. [59640]

Mr. Meacher: I have today laid before the House new Regulations (the Groundwater Regulations 1998) which will provide additional protection for groundwater. The Regulations cover England, Wales and Scotland.

The Regulations introduce controls over disposals to land which could pollute groundwater, prohibit discharges of List I substances to groundwater, and provide powers for the environment agencies to control activities which may pollute groundwater. Activities already controlled by a waste management licence are excluded from the scope of the Regulations since groundwater protection is, where appropriate, already taken into account in waste management assessments.

Groundwater is an increasingly important good quality resource for drinking water as well as a vital element of the aquatic environment. By affording additional protection to groundwater, the Regulations should help to contain water undertakers' costs where it is necessary to clean up aquifers. There should also be longer term environmental gains through enhanced protection of water quality.

The Regulations apply to all groundwater and their scope is potentially wide, but the sectors most likely to be affected are those where discharges or disposals to land which could affect groundwater have not been regulated as a matter of course, such as the spreading of used sheep dip.

The Regulations have been subject to wide public consultation as a result of which my officials and the environment agencies have sought to develop a simplified approach to implementation. The Environment Agency has also issued a consultation paper on a revised charging scheme. This provides for reduced charges for applications for authorisations relating to small and infrequent disposals to land, such as those arising from agriculture. A similar approach is likely in Scotland.

The Department intends in due course to consult on draft guidance on implementation of the Regulations.

Radioactive Waste

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the oral Statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 540, if he will make a further statement on the timetable for the issue of a consultation paper on radioactive waste management. [59641]

Mr. Meacher: The House of Lord Select Committee on Science and Technology's inquiry into "The Management of Nuclear Waste in the UK" is currently taking evidence from interested parties. The inquiry is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The Government will respond to the Committee within two months of its report. The Government aim to issue a consultation paper on radioactive waste management about six months after that.

Policy Appraisal

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to publish the work commissioned to follow-up the Policy Appraisal and the Environment initiative. [59642]

Mr. Meacher: DETR commissioned a report, from consultants EFTEC under the leadership of Prof. David Pearce, which is published today under the title "Review of Technical Guidance on Environmental Appraisal". This important report surveys the range of environmental appraisal guidance methodologies available internationally and points the way to the right technique for appraising different types of decisions. The report concludes that considerable guidance is available, but identifies areas where more guidance would be useful to practitioners. DETR is therefore commissioning work in these areas to make good this gap.

First, more technical guidance is needed in some areas. The Government will initiate projects with private sector contractors to provide guidance material on Undertaking Multicriteria Analysis and on Undertaking Contingent Valuation, which should be of potential use in both DETR and other Departments.

Secondly, most existing guidance relates to projects, and somewhat different techniques are needed to help decision makers screen policies and programmes for potential environmental impacts. The Government agree with this finding, and may develop further the guidance that has already been made available to staff.

The report from professor David Pearce makes a highly constructive contribution to the pursuit of better environmental appraisal in decision making. Through its analysis of existing guidance, it will be of use not just to the UK Government, but to all who want to consider the environmental impacts of decision making. The Government accept the conclusions about the areas where further work would be useful—Green Ministers are discussing the best way to address these, notably in the area of policy appraisal.

Copies of the report have been sent today to the Chairman of the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee, and placed in the House Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on relations between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England. [59608]

Mr. Straw: A Compact setting out a framework for relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England will be published on Thursday 12 November. Copies of the document will be placed in the Library. Separate Compacts have been developed in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the further report referred to in his letter to hon. Members dated 30 July, on the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement on the Government's intention to appoint a Royal Commission on animal experiments. [59028]

Mr. George Howarth: I understand that the Animal Procedures Committee is currently working to finalise a further report on its review of the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

With regard to the Royal Commission, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *473–74*.

Pre-Marital Counselling

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Society of Registration Officers on the provision of premarital counselling to those who marry in registry offices; and if he will make available extra resources to *(a)* train existing staff in pre-marital counselling skills and *(b)* recruit and train the extra staff required. [58764]

Mr. Boateng: My officials have met members of the Society of Registration Officers, together with other

registrars. They were interested in, and broadly supportive of, the Government's proposals concerning the role of registrars.

The consultation document "Supporting Families" proposes that registrars might offer information to couples about marriage and the pre-marriage support services available. This might take the form of a marriage preparation pack produced by experts in the field. Counselling of couples by registration officers is not proposed.

The consultation period of "Supporting Families" runs to 31 January 1999. The Society of Registration Officers has been invited to comment on the Government's proposals. The Government will decide on the allocation of resources once the consultation exercise is completed and decisions have been taken on what should be implemented.

Police Forces (Ethnic Composition)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of police officers in each police force area broken down by grade and indicating for each grade how many are of Asian origin. [59073]

Mr. Boateng: The information is set out in the table. Further information on ethnic minority staff in the police service can be obtained in Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Police Service Personnel" (Issue 17/98) issued on 3 September 1998, a copy of which is in the Library.

Total police force strength and total Asian officers, by rank, as at 31 March 1998

Police force	*Chief Constable*		*Assistant Chief Constable*		*Superintendent*		*Chief Inspector*	
	Total	*Asian*	*Total*	*Asian*	*Total*	*Asian*	*Total*	*Asian*
Avon and Somerset	1	—	2	—	27	—	39	—
Bedfordshire	1	—	2	—	15	—	14	—
Cambridgeshire	1	—	1	—	12	—	15	—
Cheshire	1	—	3	—	21	—	31	—
City of London	1	—	2	—	10	—	11	—
Cleveland	1	—	2	—	25	—	6	—
Cumbria	1	—	2	—	12	—	16	—
Derbyshire	1	—	3	—	22	—	21	—
Devon and Cornwall	1	—	3	—	29	—	48	—
Dorset	1	—	2	—	16	—	21	—
Durham	1	—	1	—	21	—	22	—
Dyfed-Powys	1	—	2	—	16	—	13	—
Essex	1	—	3	—	28	—	47	1
Gloucestershire	1	—	2	—	9	—	16	—
Greater Manchester	1	—	6	—	80	—	87	—
Gwent	1	—	2	—	12	—	16	—
Hampshire	1	—	3	—	34	—	43	—
Hertfordshire	1	—	2	—	23	—	26	—
Humberside	1	—	3	—	18	—	28	—
Kent	1	—	4	—	28	—	47	—
Lancashire	1	—	4	1	30	—	28	—
Leicestershire	1	—	3	—	18	—	21	—
Lincolnshire	1	—	2	—	14	—	22	—
Merseyside	1	—	4	—	51	—	53	—
Metropolitan Police	8	—	28	—	211	—	342	—
Norfolk	1	—	1	—	17	—	21	—
Northamptonshire	1	—	2	—	13	—	11	—
Northumbria	0	—	4	—	40	—	50	—
North Wales	1	—	2	—	16	—	27	—
North Yorkshire	1	—	2	—	12	—	19	—
Nottinghamshire	1	—	3	—	21	—	22	1
South Wales	1	—	4	—	27	—	51	1
South Yorkshire	1	—	4	—	38	—	45	—
Staffordshire	1	—	3	—	25	—	31	—
Suffolk	1	—	2	—	12	—	16	—
Surrey	1	—	3	—	20	—	18	—
Sussex	1	—	4	—	29	—	38	—
Thames Valley	1	—	3	—	49	—	34	—
Warwickshire	1	—	2	—	11	—	9	—
West Mercia	1	—	3	—	16	—	31	—
West Midlands	1	—	3	—	52	—	66	—
West Yorkshire	1	—	5	—	40	1	73	—
Wiltshire	1	—	2	—	14	—	16	—
Total strength	49	0	143	1	1,234	1	1,610	3

Total police force strength and total Asian officers, by rank, as at 31 March 1998

Police force	Inspector		Sergeant		Constable		All ranks	
	Total	Asian	Total	Asian	Total	Asian	Total	Asian
Avon and Somerset	150	—	449	—	2,308	6	2,976	6
Bedfordshire	57	1	147	1	843	14	1,079	16
Cambridgeshire	64	—	185	—	1,014	6	1,291	6
Cheshire	92	—	293	—	1,601	—	2,042	0
City of London	52	—	115	—	634	—	825	0
Cleveland	77	—	226	1	1,146	12	1,483	13
Cumbria	54	—	168	—	911	2	1,164	2
Derbyshire	89	1	273	5	1,363	15	1,772	21
Devon and Cornwall	138	—	420	—	2,323	1	2,962	1
Dorset	66	—	201	—	1,003	1	1,310	1
Durham	75	—	211	—	1,184	4	1,515	4
Dyfed-Powys	48	—	173	—	749	—	1,002	0
Essex	134	—	452	2	2,264	6	2,929	9
Gloucestershire	53	—	162	—	861	7	1,104	7
Greater Manchester	352	1	1,008	12	5,416	47	6,949	60
Gwent	58	—	193	—	951	—	1,233	0
Hampshire	162	—	510	3	2,737	9	3,490	12
Hertfordshire	96	—	264	—	1,328	5	1,740	5
Humberside	109	—	297	—	1,565	6	2,021	6
Kent	162	—	461	2	2,548	12	3,251	14
Lancashire	174	—	516	2	2,504	19	3,257	22
Leicestershire	93	—	260	9	1,587	36	1,983	45
Lincolnshire	65	—	182	—	905	2	1,191	2
Merseyside	186	1	628	—	3,293	26	4,216	27
Metropolitan Police	1,186	5	4,164	14	20,156	147	26,094	166
Norfolk	67	1	207	—	1,115	2	1,430	3
Northamptonshire	54	1	164	1	925	6	1,169	8
Northumbria	185	—	529	1	2,961	3	3,769	4
North Wales	69	—	226	—	1,055	—	1,396	0
North Yorkshire	65	1	215	—	1,053	3	1,367	4
Nottinghamshire	114	1	331	2	1,831	18	2,323	22
South Wales	155	1	439	1	2,309	6	2,986	9
South Yorkshire	156	—	479	4	2,459	27	3,182	31
Staffordshire	121	—	329	—	1,782	8	2,292	8
Suffolk	57	—	171	—	927	6	1,186	6
Surrey	88	—	242	—	1,237	9	1,608	9
Sussex	158	—	465	2	2,343	2	3,038	4
Thames Valley	188	1	564	5	2,937	22	3,776	28
Warwickshire	47	1	130	3	724	15	924	19
West Mercia	115	—	290	—	1,554	9	2,010	9
West Midlands	319	2	984	10	5,731	111	7,156	123
West Yorkshire	245	1	722	7	4,069	55	5,155	64
Wiltshire	60	—	175	—	888	2	1,156	2
Total strength	6,052	19	18,616	87	97,094	687	124,798	798

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of scurvy have been reported each year over the last five years in hostels for asylum seekers in the Greater London area. [58955]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not held centrally.

TREASURY

Agriculture (Revenue)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of revenue for the Exchequer has been generated by the agriculture sector for each of the last 10 years *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in current prices and *(c)* as a percentage of total revenue. [57508]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* The information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

GDP Growth

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the GDP growth required in each of the next three financial years to satisfy the golden rule. [58837]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The projections set out in the Pre-Budget published on 3 November 1998 show that the Government expect to meet both their fiscal rules over the economic cycle. Paragraph 2.56 of that report explains how these projects are robust to errors in short-term growth forecasts.

Pensioners (Fuel Bills)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 681–88, if he will provide a breakdown of his estimate of the savings made by *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* the poorest pensioners on their fuel bills. [58991]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The table provides a breakdown of the real term savings on pensioners' fuel bills between price reductions and winter fuel payments. The fuel bills include VAT.

Pensioners' real term savings on fuel bills: 1997–99

	Savings from VAT reduction, regulation and competition[1]	*Average winter fuel payment*[2]	*Total*
Average pensioner household	62	46	108
Pensioner household on Income Support[3]	50	90	140

[1] Assuming annual gas consumption of 18,000kwh, electricity consumption of 3,300kwh.
[2] Weighted average, 1995 prices.
[3] A lower gas consumption of 12,000kwh is assumed.

Correspondence

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Financial Secretary will provide a substantive reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Taunton ref. DC/3867, dated 9 September. [59150]

Dawn Primarolo: I have replied to the hon. Member.

Euro Notes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) for what reasons euro notes are printed by the Bank of England at Debden in Essex; [58017]

(2) how many euro notes have been printed by the Bank of England at Debden in Essex; at what cost; of what denominations; for what purpose; and who will bear the cost; [58079]

(3) if euro notes printed by the Bank of England at Debden, Essex display the Queen's head. [58287]

Ms Hewitt: Since the European Monetary Institute (EMI) was established in 1994, the Bank of England has been closely involved, along with other EU central banks, in the technical preparation of the euro banknotes. As part of this work, the Bank has agreed to participate in a trial of notes to be introduced in 2002 in countries joining the single currency on 1 January 1999 to ensure consistency of paper quality, colour etc., across different types of banknote printing machines. The designs are therefore in accordance with the European Central Bank's announcement on euro note designs of 11 September. The notes being printed are for analytical and comparative purposes and will not be issued in the UK.

The trial will involve the Bank printing some 2 million of each of the 20 and 50 euro notes, and 5 million of the 5 euro note. The total cost of this exercise will be approximately £300,000 and will be paid out of the proceeds of the note issue.

Economic and Monetary Union

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the outcome of the most recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Preparations for EMU. [59576]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Standing Committee on preparations for EMU met for the third time on 27 October. A copy of the minutes of the meeting has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Committee was informed of the success of the Government's national information campaign and received reports on public and private sector preparations.

Breast Cancer

Ms Perham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of breast cancer have been diagnosed in women aged 65 years and over in the last year; and how many resulting fatalities there have been in women aged 65 years and over in each of the last five years. [59146]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Linda Perham, dated 11 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the cases of breast cancer in women over 65 years.

Provisional figures show that there were 12,708 newly diagnosed cases of breast cancer in women aged 65 years and over in England and Wales in 1994 (the most recent year for which data are available); the numbers of deaths in 1993–1997 are given in the table below.

Deaths from breast cancer in England and Wales, 1993–1997

Year	*Number*
1993	8,172
1994	7,998
1995	7,829
1996	7,748
1997	7,579

CABINET OFFICE

Public Appointments (Ethnic Origins)

Helen Jones: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to change the Government's policy on non-disclosure of information on the ethnic origin of individuals appointed to public bodies. [59575]

Mr. Kilfoyle: In line with the Government's commitment to greater openness in public appointments, a new policy is being introduced with effect from 1 April 1999. This will require all departments to collect ethnic origin data for their public appointees, on the understanding that such information will be made publicly available on request, subject to the consent of the individuals concerned. The policy will apply to new appointments and re-appointments made from that date.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the percentage of the population of England and Wales eligible for green form advice and assistance *(a)* with no contribution and *(b)* with a contribution, in each of the last 10 years. [58322]

Mr. Hoon: We do not collect information on eligibility for non-contributory legal advice and assistance under the green form scheme. Contributory green form advice and assistance was abolished on 12 April 1993.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the percentage of the population of England and Wales eligible for *(a)* criminal legal aid and *(b)* civil legal aid (i) with no contribution and (ii) with a contribution, in each of the last 10 years. [58321]

Mr. Hoon: There is no upper financial limit for criminal legal aid so the question of an eligible population does not arise.

For civil legal aid, the percentage of households in England and Wales eligible in each year for 1992/93, being the earliest year for which figures are readily available, was as follows:

Percentage

Year	*Non contributory*	*Contributory*
1992–93	29	24
1993–94	23	25
1994–95	24	26
1995–96	24	26
1996–97	23	25
1997–98	23	25

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the percentage of people in receipt of *(a)* family credit and *(b)* housing benefit, entitled to civil legal aid (i) with no contribution and (ii) with a contribution, in each of the last 10 years. [58323]

Mr. Hoon: We do not collect the information requested.

PRIME MINISTER

Area Cost Adjustment

Q13. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to reform the area cost adjustment. [57842]

The Prime Minister: We expect to announce our proposals for Standard Spending Assessments for 1999/2000 in due course.

Electoral Reform (Referendum)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 868, when he expects to announce the date of the referendum on the voting system. [59292]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The date has not been decided. It had always been envisaged that the referendum would take place before the next election. It should be held at the earliest moment it is sensible to do so, in the light of all the constitutional changes we anticipate and the recommendations of the Jenkins Commission. If it proves impossible to do so before the election for sound practical reasons, then it should be held at the earliest moment it is appropriate to do so.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 11 November. [58839]

The Prime Minister: Earlier today, together with Madam Speaker and right hon. and hon. Members and millions of people across the country, I observed a two-minute silence to commemorate the sacrifices made by so many on behalf of us all.

Later today in addition to my duties in the House I will have meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others.

Government Service Delivery

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister if it is the Government's policy to promote the concept of a single account which would handle most financial transactions between Government and the individual. [59145]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have been asked to reply.

The concept of a single account is one of a number of ideas, which are being considered as possible ways of simplifying the delivery of Government services for the citizen.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

World Bank

9. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met the President of the World bank to discuss the impact of world financial affairs on international development; and if she will make a statement. [57809]

Clare Short: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I met the President of the World Bank during the Annual Meetings in Washington in early October. During our discussions, and at the meetings themselves, we stressed the importance we attach to addressing the social implications of the current financial crisis. This is important because the poor had no part in causing the crisis and should not be left to bear the brunt but also because national consensus is needed to carry through some of the reforms needed to overcome the crisis. This is unlikely to be reached in highly divided societies. The communiqués of the Interim and Development Committees reflected our concerns, noting the need to mitigate the most harmful effects of the crisis on the poor.

Child Labour

10. **Dr. Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been

made on measures to ensure that companies work to eliminate the use of child labour in countries where they operate or are supplied from. [57811]

Mr. Foulkes: We support the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) whose members—companies, development NGOs and trade unions—are developing best practices in implementing voluntary supplier codes. Among other things, these codes aim to eliminate child labour in supply chains. ETI is part of a consumer-led movement against child labour to which many companies have responded.

We are also supporting ILO programmes for the elimination of child labour which are supported by the unions, Governments and employers representatives that make up the ILO governing body. In addition we are examining the scope for increasing the effectiveness of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and will be pressing for the incorporation of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, of which the effective abolition of child labour is a crucial part.

Non-governmental Organisations

11. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the current role of *(a)* NGOs and *(b)* the private sector in the delivery of aid using resources from the UK Government. [57812]

Clare Short: Where possible we work to strengthen local capacity in developing countries to manage and deliver improvements in health care, education, governance and economic management. Frequently NGOs and private sector consultants assist these efforts. We have established a Business Partnership Unit in DFID in order to work with the private sector to encourage and facilitate beneficial investment in developing countries. We are currently consulting NGOs and civil society world wide on how NGOs can best assist the implementation of the international poverty eradication strategy.

Debt Relief

12. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's debt-reduction programmes. [57813]

Clare Short: My Department supports debt reduction programmes where these help eradicate poverty and has obtained agreement at the annual meeting of the World Bank and IMF that the HIPC initiative will be reviewed to ensure that debt relief contributes to poverty elimination. My Department has written off £1.26 billion of debt since 1978. We are seeking to speed up the implementation of the HIPC initiative to ensure that all eligible countries are on track for debt relief by 2000. We are currently providing £100 million to help some HIPC countries meet their debt service payments in advance of receiving debt relief.

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent steps the Government have taken to alleviate the adverse effects of the burden of debt repayments of the poorest countries of the world. [59005]

Clare Short: Over the past eighteen months, the Department for International Development (DFID) has cancelled some £30 million of bilateral aid debts, and provided some £36 million to help the African Development Bank meet its share of the cost of implementing the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt Initiative. In addition, we are providing around £100 million to help a number of developing countries meet their debt service payments to the international financial institutions; we have committed $10 million to help meet Mozambique's residual financing gap under the HIPC Initiative; and we have contributed £400,000 to Debt Relief International, a London based organisation, which delivers technical assistance in debt management to poor countries. We are also funding research on the key issues of debt sustainability and internal debt.

As well as providing direct financial support to help relieve poor countries of their debt burdens, we are taking action to ensure that the forthcoming comprehensive review of the HIPC Initiative looks at whether sufficient levels of debt relief are being provided to developing countries. We are pressing for the review to examine in more detail the relationship between debt relief and poverty reduction, to make certain that debt relief will help developing countries achieve the international development targets. And the Chancellor and I have just proposed a new initiative, calling on bilateral and multilateral creditors to find ways of providing debt relief to countries which have been struck by natural disasters, thereby freeing urgent resources to fund emergency relief and reconstruction.

22. **Mr. Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on action her Department is taking to relieve the pressure of chronic debts for the poorest developing countries. [57823]

Clare Short: The Chancellor and I are working to seek international agreement to speed up the implementation of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative so that all eligible countries will be on track for debt relief by 2000. In addition over the last eighteen months, the Department for International Development (DFID) has cancelled some £30 million of bilateral aid debts, and provided some £36 million to help the African Development Bank meet its share of the cost of implementing the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt Initiative. We are also providing around £100 million to help a number of developing countries meet their debt service payments to the international financial institutions. We have committed $10 million to help meet Mozambique's residual financing gap under the HIPC Initiative; and we have contributed £400,000 to Debt Relief International to provide technical assistance in debt management to poor countries. We are also funding research on the key issues of debt sustainability and internal debt.

We are also taking action to ensure that the forthcoming comprehensive review of the HIPC Initiative looks at whether sufficient levels of debt relief is being provided to developing countries. We are pressing for the review to examine in more detail the relationship between debt relief and poverty reduction, to make certain that debt relief will help developing countries achieve the international development targets.

St. Helena

13. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to visit the island of St. Helena to discuss future aid provision. [57814]

Mr. Foulkes: There are no immediate plans for a Ministerial visit to St. Helena.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

14. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has received in relation to the impact of the proposed multilateral agreement on investment on future development needs. [57815]

Clare Short: I have received a large number of letters from members of the public, Members of Parliament and non-governmental organisations about the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). My Department is in regular contact with non-governmental organisations taking an interest in the MAI. Officials from my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry met a group of experts from the academic community in September to discuss the development implications of the MAI.

19. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the multilateral agreement on investment on future development needs. [57820]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) on 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *203*.

Bangladesh

15. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the situation in Bangladesh following the recent floods. [57816]

Clare Short: Monsoon flooding in Bangladesh this year was the most prolonged this century, lasting more than 10 weeks in some areas. Waters began to recede from central districts in mid-September, and broadly returned to normal by the end of the month, though waterlogging persists in some areas. The Government of Bangladesh, in partnership with the World Band and the Asian Development Bank in particular, have moved rapidly to begin repair of roads, bridges, railways and flood protection embankments. Major communications are fully restored, though very considerable work remains to be done on many rural roads and other infrastructure.

Although many people are short of food, often for want of immediate employment, and there have been outbreaks of diarrhoeal disease, there is at present no famine or unusual epidemic of diseases as suggested by some media reports. However there has been an almost complete loss of seasonal crops in some areas, and many people have lost homes, assets and livelihoods. Millions of people require assistance to restart rural livelihoods, rebuild their homes, and earn a living. The Government of Bangladesh are distributing food to vulnerable people, and the gap in food supply is being managed through increased public and private sector imports. They are managing the food supply jointly with the World Food Programme, and providing small cash grants. The UK has contributed £11 million to ensuring food availability over the coming months. NGOs are also helping with small grants and loans to restore homes and livelihoods.

Much of the restoration of infrastructure will be done through cash of food for work schemes to give people an income. DFID is contributing a further £10 million in projects to rehabilitate agriculture, essential infrastructure, and to support NGO projects which help the poor rebuild their lives. In parallel with urgent work which has already started, donors, including the UK, are working in sector sub groups jointly with Government and some NGO partners, to establish the full extent of priority rehabilitation needs. The situation is expected to appear to return to normal in around five months, but continuing attention to the longer term, unseen impacts on the economy, financial institutions and peoples' assets will be needed for some time to come.

20. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what help she is giving the Government of Bangladesh to remove arsenic from subterranean water supplies. [57821]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) has been assisting efforts to understand the causes of arsenic in ground water in Bangladesh and developing plans to address the problem. Arsenic occurs naturally as a result of geochemical processes. It can be tackled only by avoiding contaminated sources or treating water at the surface. The World Bank is co-ordinating assistance, and has allocated $30 million to helping counteract arsenic contamination. DFID has provided £0.5 million to fund the technical research needed to implement this, working through the British Geological Survey with the Department of Public Health in Dhaka. We are also appraising a larger project which would pilot community schemes for the treatment of polluted water and the medical care of those affected by arsenicosis. The project would also study why the problem affects some individuals and not others. It is hoped that the pilot, if effective, may form a model for replication by others.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

16. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the future of the Commonwealth Development Corporation. [57817]

Clare Short: We intend to put legislative proposals to Parliament as early as possible to pave the way for the creation of a public/private partnership with the Commonwealth Development Corporation which will benefit from both its association with Government and the participation of the private sector, and which will enable CDC to contribute more effectively to the sustainable development of poor countries.

Genetically Modified Organisms

17. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the potential impact on poor farmers of terminator gene technology. [57818]

Clare Short: My Department is currently undertaking a wide-ranging review of the implications of all aspects of genetically modified organisms for poor farmers in developing countries.

This study will assess the impact of specific technologies, including terminator gene technology, and will be made publicly available.

Fraud

18. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what priority her Department gives to countering fraud in its aid programmes. [57819]

Clare Short: My Department gives a high priority to preventing fraud. To ensure regularity, propriety and value for money in the expenditure of aid funds, Departmental staff and aid recipients are required to follow detailed procedures and to keep comprehensive financial records. Our control systems are under constant review by our internal auditors and are subject to examination by the National Audit Office.

Full details of the Department for International Development's (DFID) procedures for authorising and accounting for expenditure are set out in the Department's Office Instructions, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Tanzania

21. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her recent visit to Tanzania to discuss development. [57822]

Clare Short: I had a very useful and constructive visit to Tanzania in late August. I was able to discuss a range of development issues affecting one of the poorest countries in the World and one of Britain's main development partners. In meetings with the President, ministers, politicians, officials and donor, private sector and civil society representatives I outlined Britain's policy for international development, which matches closely with Tanzania's own poverty eradication strategy. I urged progress on corruption and speedy reform of the health and education sectors to improve the quality of services. I was impressed by DFID-supported projects helping to improve family health and to improve people's livelihoods in poor rural areas. I also signed an agreement to provide £60 million budgetary support over the next two years. This includes up to £50 million in multilateral debt relief, which will be used to release Tanzania's revenues for expenditure on pro-poor areas of the budget.

Romania

23. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has held in the last 12 months with the Government of Romania on the issue of the welfare and protection of children. [57824]

Clare Short: Discussions and collaboration have continued with the Romanian government through the European Children's Trust on a project to strengthen the capacity of local government to improve the welfare of vulnerable children and families.

Our assistance has included:

advice on the responsibilities and structures of local authorities to enable them to own and manage services to vulnerable children and families;

advice on systems and models within which integrated social work services can operate, and

support for the establishment of Centres for Family Support and Child Protection in five countries.

We are also supporting 2 small projects, both based in Arad, which will strengthen the capacity of the local government to help young people from orphanages.

So far we have spent £360,000 on these projects.

Aid Disbursement

24. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will take steps to increase the accountability of the way in which EU aid money is disbursed. [57825]

Clare Short: We consistently support measures to improve the financial management and control of the Community budget. In particular we support measures to strengthen the role of the European Court of Auditors which were agreed at the Amsterdam Intergovernmental conference last year. Improving financial management and strengthening the fight against fraud were priorities of the UK Presidency of the EU.

26. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the proportion of the UK aid programme which is disbursed through multilateral organisations. [57827]

Clare Short: In 1997–98 nearly one half of the UK aid programme was disbursed through multilateral organisations.

Jubilee 2000

25. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving to the Jubilee 2000 project. [57826]

Clare Short: My Department gives no financial support to Jubilee 2000. But we share the objective of early cancellation of the unpayable debts of the poorest, most heavily indebted countries. I was pleased to have been able to address the Jubilee 2000 rally in Birmingham in May, attended by some 50,000 people from all over Britain lobbying for the cancellation of debt to the poorest countries. This helped to ensure that debt was on the agenda of the G8 Summit. We are clear that debt relief is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for consistent poverty reduction. Some very poor countries have managed to pay their debt but need assistance to support poverty reduction and some countries such as Uganda which have received debt relief need continuing development assistance if they are to meet the international poverty eradication targets.

Kosovo

27. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the assistance needs of the people of Kosovo. [57828]

Clare Short: The most pressing need is to provide emergency assistance to the displaced, and in particular to those without adequate shelter, to enable them to survive the winter. My Department has allocated £3 million to UNHCR, ICRC and to UK NGOs, such as Oxfam and

Save the Children Fund, primarily to meet these winterisation needs through the provision of materials to repair homes and construct shelters, clothes and blankets, and stoves and fuel.

UN Funds for Population Activities

Ms McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will seek to persuade *(a)* the United States Government to reinstate its funding for United Nations Funds for Population Activities for the coming year and *(b)* other EU Governments to increase their contributions to United Nations Funds for Population Activities. [57951]

Clare Short: The quinquennial review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) is an opportunity for all Governments to review their support to population and reproductive health programmes, including the work of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). We are doing all that we can to ensure that resources to implement ICPD are forthcoming.

Rain Forests

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department has taken to encourage tropical nations to maintain the size and diversity of their rain forests. [58715]

Clare Short: My Department's aim is the elimination of poverty through the promotion of sustainable development, including conservation of the environment. Our approach towards the conservation of rain forests and the problem of deforestation is to support work with our country partners bilaterally and multilaterally to improve management of forest resources in ways that lead to a range of benefits to poor communities as well as helping to secure the global environmental benefits that forests offer. These activities positively encourage partner countries to protect and maintain the size and diversity of their forests.

Our approach to forests, encompasses a wide range of interventions from policy and sector planning, institutional development, education and training, through to forest information systems, forest management, forest conservation and research. The current portfolio of projects represents a commitment of £128 million.

In the past year, DFID has also supported a number of important new initiatives, for example:

- a grant of £3 million to the Guyana Sustainable Human Development Project, which will benefit forest-dependent communities encircling the Iwokrama Rain Forest.
- a grant of £2 million to the UNDP's Global Programme on Forests: Forest Management to Support Sustainable Livelihoods Project, which will promote public and private sector partnerships for sustainable forest management.
- a grant of £400,000 to the FRA 2000 project—FAO's global assessment of the status and condition of forest resources.

DFID also played an active part in the development and implementation of the Action Programme on Forests which was approved by Foreign Ministers and endorsed by Heads of Government at the G8 Birmingham Summit. This commits G8 Members to a range of specific measures at domestic and international levels designed to support sustainable forest management. DFID is also actively involved in the UN Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, whose remit is to promote and facilitate the implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) proposals for action, and reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. The UNDP Global Programme on Forests to which DFID has provided a substantial contribution will concentrate on the implementation of the IPF's proposals for action. DFID also continues to support the work of the International Tropical Timber Organisation, which is dedicated to promoting the conservation, sustainable management and rational utilisation and trade of the world's tropical forest resources, through international co-operation.

Details of my Department's forestry activities are set out in our publications: *forests* MATTER and our DFID Forestry Sector Projects, both of which are in the Library of the House and are available from DFID's Environment Policy Department.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Interviews (Audio Recording)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the differences between the draft code of practice on audio recording of police interviews with terrorist suspects and those which apply elsewhere in the United Kingdom [58319]

Mr. Ingram: There is no formal arrangement in Great Britain for the audio recording of police interviews with terrorist suspects. The recently published Draft Code of Practice under Section 53A of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 has been largely modelled on the equivalent Code of Practice made under the Police and Criminal Evidence legislation, with some differences. Following consideration of comments made during the current consultation exercise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may modify the Draft Code, and will then lay it in Parliament for approval by both Houses.

Integrated Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been saved by the Government as a result of its decision not to fund the education of the children of Oakwood Integrated Primary School, Strangford Integrated College and Ulidia Integrated College, since they opened; and if she will make a statement. [58555]

Mr. McFall: The source information required to establish accurately the recurrent budget the above schools would have received if they had been grant-aided is not currently available to the Department of Education. Based on an average per capita allocation it is estimated that their budgets would have totalled about £1,270,000 had they been grant-aided since they opened.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans she has to support the Integrated Education Fund in achieving their stated target for children in Northern Ireland attending integrated schooling by 2008; and if she will make a statement; [58551]

(2) what plans she has to remove matters of opinion from the criteria applied in assessing a school in Northern Ireland for integrated status; and if she will make a statement; [58549]

(3) when the Integrated Education Working Group will publish its report; and if she will make a statement; [58553]

(4) when she will announce her decision on whether she will recognise Oakwood Integrated Primary School, Strangford Integrated College and Ulidia Integrated College; and if she will make a statement; [58557]

(5) what objectives she has set for the Integrated Education Working Group; and if she will make a statement; [58552]

(6) what plans the Government have to make a financial contribution to the running of Oakwood Integrated Primary School, Strangford Integrated College and Ulidia Integrated College; and if she will make a statement; [58556]

(7) what is the Government's target for the percentage of children attending integrated schools in Northern Ireland by 2008; and if she will make a statement; [58550]

(8) what criteria need to be met to enable a school to be formally recognised as an integrated school; and if she will make a statement. [58558]

Mr. McFall: Government do not set targets for the expansion of Integrated schools. Government policy is to encourage and facilitate integrated education and in responding to parental demand the DENI will continue to support robust proposals for both new and transforming integrated schools.

The Integrated Education Working Group has been considering how all schools might contribute to the promotion of a culture of tolerance, concentrating initially on integrated schools and integration within schools. A Progress Report from the group has been received very recently and I will wish to take time to consider its findings and conclusions before arranging for its wider publication. However, I expect the report to provide the strategic context within which the Integrated Education Fund, which is represented on the Working Group, can take forward its 10-year Development Plan.

Proposals for new integrated schools are considered against well-established criteria which include intake and enrolment viability, religious balance, availability of alternative integrated provision, impact on other schools, availability of a suitable, cost-effective site, affordability, and consideration of objections. There are no plans to change the existing criteria.

Development proposals for Oakwood Integrated Primary School, Strangford Integrated College and Ulidia Integrated College are currently under consideration and it is hoped to announce decisions before Christmas. If the proposals are approved, the schools will be eligible for 100 per cent. recurrent funding with effect from September 1999 and, when longer term viability has been established, will also be eligible for capital grant towards accommodation needs.

Marriages (Special Licence)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were married by special licence in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [59024]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested above in relation to total marriages by special licence is set out in the table.

Marriages by special licence

Year	*Number*
1993	314
1994	311
1995	339
1996	363
1997	339
Total marriages	1,666

Industrial Development Board

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures she proposes to improve the *(a)* accountability, *(b)* targeting of investment, *(c)* stricter adherence to investment criteria and *(d)* development of performance indicators for the Industrial Development Board's overseas offices. [59181]

Mr. Ingram: All these issues have been considered by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland in his report on inward investment which was presented to the House of Commons on 27 October. As the report may be the subject of consideration by the Committee of Public Accounts of this House, it would not be appropriate for me to pre-empt such consideration by commenting on these matters.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland Audit Office report into the operation of the Industrial Development Board's inward investment programme from 1987 to 1997. [59179]

Mr. Ingram: As this Report has been presented to the House of Commons and may be the subject of detailed consideration by the Committee of Public Accounts of this House it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the Report at this point in time.

Inward Investment

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps she will take to attract inward investment projects to the 11 designated areas of social need in Northern Ireland. [59180]

Mr. Ingram: The Industrial Development Board (IDB) for Northern Ireland continues to promote the excellent business opportunities for investment in Northern Ireland through initiatives such as the recent North American Roadshow. Higher levels of assistance are available to projects located in or adjacent to areas of social need, and the IDB seeks to achieve its targets of 75 per cent. of all first time projects to be located in or adjacent to these areas.

SCOTLAND

Chefs

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had on the provision of chefs in the Scottish tourism industry with the Scottish Tourist Board; and what plans he has to bring forward initiatives to encourage more students to train as chefs. [57066]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* There are already several initiatives in place to promote and develop career opportunities in the hospitality sector. These are being undertaken by Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and their local enterprise companies. An assessment of the scope for further action, particularly in relation to the provision of chefs, will be informed by a meeting which Scottish Enterprise is expected to have shortly with the Scottish Chefs Association. While the Scottish Tourist Board and I have not so far discussed this matter, we may do so in the future if it appears appropriate.

Teachers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new teacher posts have been created in each of the last five years in the secondary phase. [58292]

Mrs. Liddell: The information is not available in the format requested. Information is collected on the overall number of teachers employed in publicly funded schools. These data cannot be used to determine the number of new "posts" created in any year.

City Status

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if the process by which the Government will draw up their advice to Her Majesty the Queen for the awarding of city status will be the same in Scotland as in the rest of the United Kingdom; [58734]

(2) what arrangements his Department proposes to make in order to select candidates to propose for city status to mark the millennium celebration and the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [58690]

Mr. Dewar: Awards of city status in any part of the UK will be made by Her Majesty The Queen acting under the Royal Prerogative, on the advice of the Government of the day. I shall make an announcement in due course that will explain the procedure to be followed by Scottish towns wishing to be considered for a grant of city status.

Prison Education

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the education budget for each prison in Scotland. [59219]

Mr. McLeish: The information is as follows:

£

Establishment	*Budget (1998–99)*
HMP Aberdeen	41,500
HMP Barlinnie	198,700
HMP Castle Huntly	38,000
HMPI Cornton Vale	78,000
HMYOI Dumfries	73,500
HMP Dungavel	63,974
HMP Edinburgh	176,148
HMP Friarton	30,600
HMP and YOI Glenochil	224,733
HMP Greenock	86,410
HMP Inverness	43,500
HMRI Longriggend	72,300
HMP Low Moss	57,500
HMP Noranside	47,192
HMP Penninghame	39,950
HMP Perth	152,100
HMP Peterhead	73,250
HM Unit Peterhead	10,400
HMYOI Polmont	148,259
HMP Shotts	181,368
HM Unit Shotts	25,500
NIC Shotts	21,000

The figures cover teaching contract and materials costs. They do not include vocational training or physical education delivered by Scottish Prison Service employees or the cost of local educational initiatives delivered in partnership with external agencies.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the financial implications of the recent reorganisation of Scottish Enterprise. [58840]

Mr. Dewar: The Government's policy for public sector pay continues to underline our commitment to increasing the efficiency of the public sector with any pay and price increases being offset by efficiencies and other economies. Scottish Enterprise's (SE) administration budget is set with due regard to the minimum consistent with efficiency and effectiveness; however, it is for SE to determine its staffing structure and requirements within these parameters. SE's administration budget for 1998–99 is £61.290 million.

DEFENCE

British Army (Complaints)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* criminal complaints and *(b)* informal non-criminal complaints were made against the British Army based in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) Germany in each of the last four years. [56399]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The information is as follows:

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland complaints against the Army are categorised as criminal or non-criminal; non-criminal complaints are categorised as formal or informal.

In his annual report in 1994, the Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures in Northern Ireland recommended that non-criminal complaints should be informally resolved at local level wherever possible.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary records show that during the last four years the following criminal complaints have been investigated, but were not necessarily substantiated.

Criminal complaints

Year	*Total*
1995	8
1996	15
1997	58
1998	[1]14

[1] Figures as at 30 June 1998

The number of formal non-criminal complaints is given in the table.

Formal non-criminal complaints

Year	*Total*
1995	21
1996	24
1997	70
1998	[1]41

[1] Figures as at 30 June 1998

The number of these formal non-criminal complaints that were substantiated is as follows:

Substantiated formal non-criminal complaints

Year	*Total*
1995	2
1996	1
1997	3
1998	fault both sides [1]2 substantiated 1

[1] New category introduced

The number of informal non-criminal complaints in the past four years is given in the table.

Informal non-criminal complaints

Year	*Total*
1995	41
1996	264
1997	590
1998	[1]344

[1] Figures are as at 30 June 1998

Germany

Records held by the Police Advisory Branch, Dusseldorf, show that during the last four years the following number of criminal complaints against the British Army in Germany have been investigated.

Year	*Total*
1995	1,424
1996	1,212
1997	1,166
1998	1,079

[1] As at 31 October 1998

Records of informal non-criminal complaints against the British Army in Germany over the last four years are not held.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service personnel were injured during the last 30 years during service in Northern Ireland. [58853]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The numbers of British Service personnel who were injured during the last 30 years, from any cause, during service in Northern Ireland are detailed in the table.

	Number of injured personnel
Army	[1]6,069
RN	[2]159
RAF	[2]137

[1] Figures are from August 1969—31 October 1998
[2] Figures are from 1 January 1976—31 October 1998

The figures relate primarily to injuries which were incurred whilst on duty; however, the manner in which data have historically been compiled means some injuries incurred whilst off duty may also be included.

The figures exclude injuries resulting in death.

Compensation Claims

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the latest year for which figures are available. [59052]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

WALES

Rural Development Grants

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much matching funding has been made available by the Welsh Office in the current financial year for the taking up of European rural development grants in Wales; and what sum he has ear-marked for the next financial year for this purpose. [58663]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: £1 million has been made available for the current financial year. Funding for future years is being considered as part of the Internal Review.

BSE

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of Government money spent in Wales to date on measures relating to BSE; and if he will make a statement. [58821]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The total amount of Government money spent in Wales on measures relating to BSE during the period 1 April 1996 to 30 September 1998 is estimated at £137 million.

Farmers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many deputations he has received from farmers' organisations in the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [58820]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Welsh Office Ministers have met with both the farming unions and farmers' deputations on several occasions during the last 6 months. These meetings are part of an ongoing, constructive

dialogue with the farmers leaders and the industry about developing long term strategies for Welsh agriculture so that it can meet the demands of the twenty first century.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the average age of farmers in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [58819]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The average age of principal farmers, growers or partners on Welsh farm holdings is estimated to be 55.

Food Prices

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between the prices paid by the customers in supermarkets and the prices paid to beef, sheepmeat and dairy producers; and if he will make a statement. [58818]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The issue of prices and competition in the market is a matter for the competition authorities. The Office of Fair Trading is currently conducting an inquiry into the overall profitability of the major supermarkets in the grocery sector. The Welsh Office is continuing to keep abreast of available research on this issue.

Drugs Awareness

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what drugs awareness programmes his Department is planning to introduce in 1999; and how much funding they will receive. [58888]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Welsh Drug and Alcohol Unit (WDAU), which operates on contract to the Department, has developed a prevention campaign to focus public attention on drug and alcohol misuse, particularly among younger people.

Phase three of this campaign will be launched in 1999 and will concentrate on new target groups, namely young people who are considered high risk and hard to reach; young people in the 16–18 age group; and children aged 9–14 in the primary and secondary school setting. Funding for this campaign will be subject to the Secretary of State's decisions on the allocation of the resources available to him in 1999–2000.

Television and Film Production

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures his Department has taken to promote television and film production in Wales. [58887]

Mr. Hain: Film is an important industry in Wales and the Department is working together with Sgrin—Media Agency for Wales and the Wales Film Commissions to further its development. Financial support is currently provided to Sgrin through the Arts Council of Wales, the Welsh Development Agency and the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation. In addition, the Welsh Development Agency has contributed to the establishment of the British Film Office in Los Angeles set up to encourage inward investment into film production in the UK. Ministerial responsibility for television lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Tenancy Agreements

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans his Department has to promote the new tenancy agreement launched recently by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations. [58886]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The tenancy agreement recently launched by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations is designed to be an example of an easy-to-read agreement which Registered Social Landlords may follow and adapt if they so wish.

The Welsh Office will seek to ensure all Registered Social Landlords do indeed utilise tenancy agreements which are easy to read.

Agricultural Subsidies

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to simplify the administration of agricultural subsidy claims; and if he will make a statement. [59319]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: On 16 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 459, the then Secretary of State announced that the Department was inviting consultants to tender for a study to assess the options for securing improved and simplified administration of Common Agricultural Policy payments to farmers within Wales. A number of options were analysed by the consultants and their report was submitted to the Welsh Office on 24 July 1998.

We are carefully considering the options and consulting with farming organisations, Welsh MPs, Welsh Office Trade Unions and staff, to seek their views, before reaching a final decision.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans his Department has to assist farmers who are experiencing difficulties in accurately completing paperwork relating to the claiming of farming subsidies and financial assistance; and if he will make a statement. [59320]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Comprehensive Guidance is issued with every claim form. That guidance and the scheme claim forms are routinely passed to the industry for comment before issue, and efforts are made to annually update and improve scheme literature.

Officials from the Welsh Office are on hand to offer guidance as appropriate.

Millennium Stadium

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 31 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *363*, if he will make a statement on progress on the Millennium Stadium at Cardiff Arms Park. [59332]

Mr. Hain: Progress on the Stadium itself is a matter for Millennium Stadium plc Discussions associated with the Government's contribution to the funding of the River Walk project are at an advanced stage and I expect the documentation to be finalised shortly. A further announcement will be made in due course.

Cardiff Airport

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of Cardiff Airport. [59511]

Mr. Hain: Cardiff International Airport is owned by TBI plc, who have invested heavily in new and improved facilities to create one of the most modern regional airports in the United Kingdom. The Airport's future prospects appear excellent, but I will be considering this further as part of an air services study for Wales which is currently under way. This study will focus on the scope for new and enhanced services as well as the role of airports in economic development.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made as to the benefits likely to accrue to Wales from a strategic rail authority. [59513]

Mr. Hain: The Strategic Rail Authority will provide clear, coherent and accountable regulation of the network, ensuring that the railways are run in the interest of passengers and freight customers. The shadow SRA, which will be operational by next spring, will be an important first step in making sure that the railway companies deliver the service the public have a right to expect. There will be Welsh representation on both the shadow SRA and its statutory successor.

Roads (Strategic Policy)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received concerning his strategic policy on roads. [59512]

Mr. Hain: The future strategy for and role of the trunk road network in Wales was set out in the report "Driving Wales Forward" published on 28 July. A number of representations have been received following publication of the report although it is not possible to give an exact number. In general terms, the report has been well received and welcomed as a positive contribution in the overall context of attempts to deliver an integrated approach to transport in Wales.

Badgers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the badger population in Wales, and if he will make a statement. [59516]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: We have made no direct estimates of the badger population in Wales. A report to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1995) based on surveys carried out in 1988 for the Nature Conservancy Council suggested a pre-breeding badger population size of 35,000 in Wales. A report by the People's Trust for Endangered Species (1997) suggests that badger activity in Britain increased by 77 per cent. between 1988 and 1997. I understand those responsible for producing these figures are reviewing them, although no revisions have been published yet.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

London Theatres

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the contribution of London theatres to inward tourism into the United Kingdom. [57176]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Government welcomed the publication earlier this year by the Society of London Theatre of The Wyndham Report on the economic impact of London's West End Theatre. It estimated that, of the total of £679 million spent by West End theatregoers in 1997, £226 million was spent by overseas visitors.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Brewing Industry

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he is making in the evaluation of vertical agreements in the brewing industry. [59163]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The new Competition Act 1998 enables vertical agreements to be excluded by order from the prohibition of anti-competitive agreements. The Government expect to consult formally on a draft order shortly.

The order will be of a general nature, applying to vertical agreements across the economy. There are no plans to make an exclusion order applying specifically to the brewing sector.

The Supply of Beer (Loan Ties, Licensed Premises and Wholesale Prices) Order 1989 and the Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order 1989 will remain in force to regulate this market.

Power Generators

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to monitor and publish performance on emissions from power generators on a basis of less than 12 months intervals. [59164]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* Annual figures for emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, including those from power generation, are published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Figures relating to 1996 were published in a DETR News Release in July this year. At the same time, the Department of Trade and Industry published provisional estimates of carbon dioxide emissions for 1997 based on energy consumption data. It is proposed that these provisional estimates will continue to be published on an annual basis.

Information on fuel use in power generation is published by the DTI on a regular basis in the monthly statistical bulletin Energy Trends. Data for fuels used in electricity generation by major power producers are published on a monthly basis and data for all generators are published on a quarterly basis.

Post Office

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to ensure protection of the interests of postal users in connection with moves to greater commercialisation of the Post Office. [59267]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The interests of postal users are being fully considered in the context of the Government's Review of the Post Office. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Review has considered public sector options for giving the Post Office greater commercial freedom while continuing to provide a universal postal service under a uniform tariff structure with a nationwide network of post offices. We hope to announce our conclusions shortly.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make an announcement about his review of post office services, with particular reference to Crown post office closure; and if he will make a statement. [57745]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Work on the Government's Review of the Post Office (including the future of the Crown conversion programme) has proceeded well. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Review has considered public sector options for giving the Post Office greater commercial freedom while continuing to provide a universal postal service under a uniform tariff structure with a nationwide network of post offices. We hope to announce our conclusions shortly.

Secure Electronic Commerce

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to facilitate electronic commerce with regard to changes in restrictions in the use of cryptography. [59225]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The Government are committed to making the UK the best environment in which business can trade electronically and thus we do not have any plans to restrict the use of cryptography, which is seen by many as a vital technology for confidence and trust. We do, however, have plans to introduce legislation, when parliamentary time permits, to set voluntary standards for those bodies providing electronic signatures and encryption services.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many responses he has received following the publication of the proposals for secure electronic commerce on 27 April 1998; and if he will list them. [59087]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* Since the April Statement, which was intended to provide information rather than solicit responses, the Department has discussed its proposals on secure electronic commerce with a number of different organisations. We would expect more formal, and quantifiable, responses from industry when we launch a consultation paper on the planned legislation on electronic commerce.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has for further consultations with industry on the proposals for secure electronic commerce announced on 27 April 1998. [59086]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The Government are committed to making the UK the best environment in which to trade electronically. We will bring forward legislation to help achieve this as soon as parliamentary time is available. The Government intend to develop the detail of the legislation in consultation with industry and other interested parties.

British Nuclear Fuels

[illegible]hidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade [illegible] what tender process was undertaken for the re[illegible] Nuclear Fuels prior to the appointment of [illegible]ntants; and if he will list the firms which su[illegible]s. [59089]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* KPMG were chosen following a competitive tender process. Six firms were invited to participate in the tender. KPMG were selected after interview of the four firms which submitted tenders. It is not normally the Department's policy to disclose the names of firms participating in such competitive tendering exercises.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the terms of reference are for KPMG accountants' review of British Nuclear Fuels. [59090]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* KPMG were engaged to carry out an initial review of the options for BNFL's future structure including, but not restricted to, some form of Public Private Partnership, having regard to the Government's objectives, which are as follows:

Safety and environmental impact

to ensure that the highest standards of safety are applied throughout BNFL's operations and that regulatory standards on environmental impact are fully complied with.

Efficient management of liabilities

to ensure that the nuclear liabilities created by past, present and future operations are discharged safely and as cost effectively as possible including the possibility of sharing risks and rewards in management of liabilities with the private sector.

Efficient management of company and employee involvement

to ensure effective incentives and disciplines are in place to deliver efficient management of the company, while ensuring employee commitment to the success of the company.

Maximise the value of the business

subject to the points above, to provide a framework in which BNFL can get the best out of its assets and maximise its value as an international business by making best use of its expertise and taking advantage of commercial opportunities as they arise.

Full value for taxpayer

to ensure that any deal involving a full or partial sale of assets provides full value for the taxpayer consistent with the degree of risk passed on to the private sector.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the cost of the review of British Nuclear Fuels being carried out by KPMG; and when the review will be completed. [59088]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* My department is paying KPMG a fixed fee of £100,000 for this work. The review will be completed by the end of this month.

Indonesia (Debt)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if Indonesia has resumed payments on its debt to the United Kingdom since it negotiated a rescheduling of this debt with the Export Credits Guarantee Department; [58432]

(2) if the rescheduling agreement with Indonesia on its debt repayments to the United Kingdom contains provisions relating to future loan guarantees for military equipment; [58435]

(3) if he will make a statement on the rescheduling of Indonesia's debt to the United Kingdom. [58433]

Mr. Wilson: The UK, together with Indonesia's other major creditors, agreed on 23 September 1998 to reschedule Indonesia's sovereign and sovereign guaranteed public sector debt falling due for payment between 6 August 1998 to 31 March 2000. The rescheduling covers principal repayments only and Indonesia continues to meet its interest payment obligations on the original maturities. The rescheduled debt is to be paid over eleven years including a three year grace period. Moratorium interest at the appropriate market rate will accrue from the dates of the original maturities. The first and subsequent payment dates for this moratorium interest will be specified in the bilateral agreement.

The bilateral debt agreement being negotiated between the UK and Indonesia covers debt in relation to both civil and military contracts signed prior to 1 July 1997 and the debt to be restructured over the period to 31 March 2000 amounts to some £240m.

The bilateral debt agreement, as is usual, will make no reference to future ECGD cover. Bearing in mind that this is to be limited rescheduling involving principal payments only, ECGD remains on cover whilst monitoring developments very closely. New commitments will be considered on a case by case basis, taking account of prevailing circumstances at the time, but priority would be given to contracts likely to contribute to Indonesia's economic recovery.

Coal

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list for each year from 1979 to 1997 what sums of compensation have been *(a)* paid to individual coal miners as a result of pit closures and *(b)* invested in regions of the United Kingdom to compensate for the closure of coal mines. [57329]

Mr. Battle: The information is as follows:

(a) The Department does not have information on total compensation paid to individual coal miners solely as a result of pit closures initiated by the previous Government. The table sets out the restructuring costs of British Coal Corporation since 1979. In addition, the Government made payments to individual mineworkers under the Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme (RMPS) which was introduced in 1967. This Scheme closed to new entrants after March 1987, but payments continue until the last beneficiary reaches the age of 65 in 2002.

£ million

Financial years	*British Coal Corporation exceptional restructuring costs'*	*RMPS*
1979–80	76	15
1980–81	108	15
1981–82	181	48
1982–83	183	80
1983–84	344	190
1984–85	242	200
1985–86	691	563
1986–87	798	610
1987–88	632	295
1988–89	400	168
1989–90	881	126
1990–91	163	93
1991–92	525	61
1992–93	767	43
1993–94	481	33
1994–95	270	29
1995–96	8	23
1996–97	0	20
1997–98	0	12
Total	6,750	2.624

' British Coal Corporation Annual Report and Accounts (various)

(b) The Department does not collect information on amounts invested in regions of the United Kingdom solely as a result of pit closures. The Coalfield closures programme in 1992 was expected to cost the Government £1 billion in redundancy payments and measures to help communities affected, and in 1993 the previous Government committed £200 million in regeneration funding. However, this sum fell below what was needed. This Government set up the Coalfields Task Force to investigate how the Government can best help regenerate the Coalfields Communities and draw together support offered to them. We will shortly be reporting on the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress made by his Department towards establishing a compensation scheme for the condition known as vibration white finger. [59006]

Mr. Battle: I fully understand the frustration of miners with VWF who have been waiting for their compensation and I am keen to start assessing claims and making payments quickly. We need to ensure that full and fair compensation is paid, but both sides have to work within the legal framework.

My priority has always been to agree arrangements with the claimants' solicitors to allow claims to be processed. We recently served our proposed handling arrangements on the plaintiffs' solicitors, revised in the light of the Court of Appeal judgment. We hope to agree arrangements with the claimants' solicitors as soon as possible. We are also proposing to the plaintiffs a single medical assessment process as a means of expediting the handling of the claims objectively. Following a meeting on 2 November, they have agreed to participate in a pilot of the medical process, this is due to commence on 1 December.

In the meantime, further work is being done to minimise any further delay once a final agreement has been reached. For instance, sets of testing equipment have already been purchased and work is in hand to identify organisations able to deliver the single medical assessment.

HEALTH

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56804]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56802]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given to him by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

North Essex Health Authority

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many appeals were heard by his Department against proposals put forward by North Essex Health Authority between 1979 and 1997; [58425]

(2) if he will list the occasions when facilities at Clacton and Harwich hospitals were retained following a successful appeal against North Essex Health Authority proposals between 1979 and 1997; [58427]

(3) if he will list the facilities at Clacton and Harwich hospitals that were the subject of reviews carried out by North Essex Health Authority between 1979 and 1997; [58428]

(4) if he will list the lengths of time taken by his Department to determine each appeal against proposals put forward by North Essex Health Authority between 1979 and 1997; [58426]

(5) how many reviews were conducted by North Essex Health Authority between 1979 and 1997. [58424]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Employment of Children Review Working Group

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the research sub-group of the Employment of Children Review working group has been set up; and what its terms of reference are; [59065]

(2) how many times the Employment of Children Review working group has met to take evidence from interested organisations and individuals; and from whom evidence has been taken; [59068]

(3) what is the current membership of the Employment of Children Review working group; [59069]

(4) how many children who are employed have been consulted by the Employment of Children Review working group; and on how many occasions; [59066]

(5) how many times the Employment of Children Review working group has met; and on what dates; [59067]

(6) when the Employment of Children Review working group is expected to report; and if he will make a statement on its progress. [59064]

Mr. Hutton: The Employment of Children Review working group has met on three occasions, 9 February, 21 July and 17 September. Membership of the working group comprises officials from the Departments of Health, Trade and Industry, Education and Employment, the Cabinet Office, the Health and Safety Executive and the Health and Social Services Executive, Northern Ireland. Membership also includes two representatives from the National Child Employment Network. Evidence has been taken from interested parties on two occasions. Those parties were, Save the Children, National Children's Home Action for Children, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Children's Rights Office, the Child Accident Prevention Trust and the British Film Commissioner. The working group will report early next year. The Research sub group will be meeting shortly; its purpose is to review the existing research, and to make recommendations to the main group based on its findings, both on any proposed changes to existing legislation and on any further research deemed necessary. The views of working children have not yet been sought, but it is intended to do so.

Prescribed Nicotine Replacement Therapy

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to make nicotine replacement therapy treatment available on prescription; [58960]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of making nicotine replacement therapy available on prescription. [58959]

Ms Jowell: We will set out our comprehensive proposals to tackle smoking in the forthcoming tobacco White Paper.

Asylum Seekers (Medical Accreditation)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to assist medically qualified asylum seekers to obtain training or take courses to gain recognised British medical qualifications; [58957]

(2) what steps he is taking to facilitate the recognition of qualifications held by medically qualified asylum seekers. [58956]

Mr. Hutton: The recognition of medical qualifications is the statutory responsibility of the General Medical Council (GMC) in respect of primary qualifications, and the Specialist Training Authority and the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for specialist qualifications.

No specific action is being taken to assist medically qualified asylum seekers to obtain training or to take courses to gain recognised British medical qualifications.

Medically qualified asylum seekers who have been given permission to work in the United Kingdom by the immigration authorities and who meet the GMC's requirements for Registration are free to apply for advertised posts in the medical training grades on the same basis as other non-United Kingdom/European Economic Area doctors. Approaching 30 per cent. of all medical trainees in the National Health Service qualified outside the United Kingdom.

Earlier this year the Department revised and reissued its guidance on the Immigration and Employment of Overseas Medical and Dental Students, Doctors and Dentists in the United Kingdom to make it clear that doctors who have sought asylum may be accepted into formal training programmes once permission to work in the UK has been granted by the immigration authorities.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is in a position to give details, by health authority, of the allocation of moneys arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review for the year 1999–2000. [58987]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) on 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *180–82*.

Health Visitor Services

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of reductions in health visitor services for the elderly on *(a)* bed blocking in hospitals and *(b)* hospital waiting lists; and if he will make a statement. [59047]

Ms Jowell: We have undertaken no such assessment.

This month, on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 688, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a further £250 million for the National Health Service (£209 million for England). This money provides further investment for the long-term as well as additional help for this coming winter.

We are committed to improving the quality of life for older people and recently announced that the next national service framework will be for older people. Our better services for vulnerable people initiative requires health and local authorities to develop joint investment plans, recuperation and rehabilitation services for older people and improved procedures for multidisciplinary assessment of older people. Our review of hospital discharge guidance will include consideration of how we can resolve the difficulties around delayed discharge.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Croatia (Arms Embargo)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what embargoes on the export of defence equipment, with particular reference to anti-tank weapons, existed in the case of exports to Croatia in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1991. [59049]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: There was no embargo on the export of defence equipment to Croatia in 1989 and 1990. The European Union and its Member States decided on 5 July 1991 to impose an embargo on armaments and military equipment applicable to the whole of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). UNSCR 713 (1991) established a general and complete embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to the SFRY with effect from 25 September 1991. The embargoes included anti-tank weapons for export to Croatia. The EU embargo remains in force in respect to Croatia.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cheques, and of what total value, have been returned by post and sub post offices as unclaimed by eligible pensioners for winter fuel payments. [57407]

Angela Eagle: The administration of Winter Fuel Payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Eric Pickles, dated 10 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question about how many cheques, and of what total value, have been returned by post and sub post offices as unclaimed by eligible pensioners for winter fuel payments.

The making of Winter Fuel Payments to almost 10 million pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998, was a challenging task for the Benefits Agency (BA). This was achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

During March this year, five million Winter Fuel Payment girocheques were sent to the Post Office for collection by those pensioners who receive a state retirement pension or widow's benefit and are paid by order book. Arrangements were made for the Post Office clerk to identify the relevant customers, as they called to collect their pension, hand them the envelope containing their girocheque, and a letter explaining the reason for the payment.

Post Offices were instructed to return any uncollected girocheques to the nearest BA office on 1 May 1998. Approximately two percent of the total number of girocheques, with a value of either £10 or £20, were returned. The information on the total value of all payments returned is only available at disproportionate cost.

It may be helpful if I explain the action that was taken on receipt of each undelivered payment. An investigation was undertaken to establish the reason why the payment had not been collected. Where it was confirmed that the pensioner was still alive a replacement payment was issued. Where the pensioner had recently died but nevertheless there was entitlement to a payment, the BA took action to pay the amount due to the next of kin or executor of the deceased's estate.

About 98% of girocheques issued to the Post Office were collected. Of the remainder, around half were returned because there was no entitlement (for example, because the customer was abroad, in hospital for an extensive period, or had died). Many of the other girocheques were not collected because of short or medium term hospitalization or spells abroad, or customer's death during or after the qualifying week. In these cases, entitlement remained, and the girocheques have now been replaced except in a very small number of cases (for example, where further evidence is required).

In making this year's Winter Fuel Payments, around the same number will be sent to the Post Office for delivery during January 1999. The Post Office have been asked to ensure all their staff are proactive in issuing the payments the first time the pensioner calls after the Post Office receive the pensioner's giro payment. The Winter Fuel Payment leaflet also advises pensioners whose payment has been sent to the Post Office to ask the clerk in the office they normally collect the payment from, if they have not been given their payment by the end of January 1999.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit Recovery

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of repayments of benefit to the Compensation Recovery Unit involving asbestos-related diseases there were in the past five years; and what were the levels of those repayments. [58411]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the Compensation Recovery Unit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 10 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Mr. Mathison to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking, how many cases of repayments of benefit to the Compensation Recovery Unit involving asbestos-related diseases there were in the past five years; and what were the levels of those repayments. As Mr. Mathison is away from the office on leave, I am replying.

The information requested is given on the table. The figures relate to asbestosis cases (the system is not designed to identify asbestos-related diseases).

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Number of repayments of benefit made to the Compensation Recovery Unit in the last five years involving asbestosis

Financial year	*Number of cases*	*Total amount repaid (£)*
1993–94	157	408,655.00
1994–95	138	1,030,457.77
1995–96	173	1,507,320.58
1996–97	240	1,860,957.46
1997–98	255	2,029,302.49

Notes:
Figures supplied by the Compensation Recovery Unit.
Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the level of benefits repaid to the Compensation Recovery Unit as a result of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997; [58408]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the levels of repayment to the Compensation Recovery Unit in each of the past five years; [58412]

(3) what were total repayments to the Compensation Recovery Unit in the current year and each of the five previous years. [58409]

Mr. Timms: Reform of the Compensation Recovery scheme took place on 6 October 1997. The compensator is now liable for the repayment of benefits paid as a consequence of an accident, injury or disease. The reforms also mean that compensation for pain and suffering will not be recovered.

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The administration of the Compensation Recovery Unit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 10 November 1998.

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Peter Mathison to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions. The questions ask about the level of benefits repaid to the Compensation Recovery Unit as a result of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997, a breakdown of the levels of repayment in each of the past five years, and what were the total repayments in the current and the last five years. As Mr. Mathison is away from the office on leave, I will reply.

It is estimated that £159 million has been repaid to the Compensation Recovery Unit as a result of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997.

A breakdown of the levels of repayment and the total repayments is given in the table.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Breakdown of levels of recoveries to the compensation recovery unit current and previous five years

£ million

Breakdown of recoveries by benefit type	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Invalidity Benefit	35.2	51.9	60.1	49.3	36.3	13.2
Incapacity Benefit	0	0	7.8	27.8	52.1	34.5
Unemployment Benefit	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.1
Sickness Benefit	3.4	4.4	5.1	4.4	3.5	1.4
Jobseeker's Allowance (C)	0	0	0	0.0002	0.03	0.02
Income Support	5.8	8	10.2	13.1	20	14.5
Attendance Allowance	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.4	1
Statutory Sick Pay	16.7	17.3	15.4	10.7	6.6	2.3
Jobseeker's Allowance (I)	0	0	0	0.0006	0.1	0.072
Mobility Allowance	1.1	1	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.3
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	9.2	12.6	16.5	19.1	22.6	12.3
Constant Attendance Allowance	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.1
Disability Living Allowance	2.8	6.6	11	13.9	7.5	0.07
Reduced Earnings Allowance	5.5	5.2	4.3	2.8	2	1.1
Retirement Allowance	0.005	0.005	0.0006	0.001	0.0009	0.0007
Family Credit	0.0009	0.0006	0	0.002	0	0
Severe Disablement Allowance	1	1.5	2	1.8	2.2	1.5
Old Cases Acts Benefits	0	0	0	0.01	0.008	0
Disability Living Allowance (Care)	0	0	0	0	8	5.4
Disability Living Allowance (Mobility)	0	0	0	0	7	7.6
Disability Working Allowance	0.02	0.05	0.08	0.1	0.2	0.1
Exceptionally Severe Disablement Allowance	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.05	0.03
Total	81.9	110.1	135.1	145.5	170.9	95.6

Notes:
Figures supplied by the Compensation Recovery Unit
Figures are provisional and subject to change.
Figure for the current year are to September 1998 inc.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants will be affected by his proposed claw-back of incapacity benefit from those with private insurance cover in the first five years after the reform is introduced. [58291]

Mr. Timms: It is not possible to identify the number of people with permanent health insurance payments arranged by their employer, who will have this income taken into account against Incapacity Benefit in the first five years after the change is introduced. However, the number is expected to be small. No existing Incapacity Benefit recipient will be affected.

Disability Income Guarantee

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much extra he estimates will be spent on the disability income guarantee in the first two years of its operation relative to what would have been spent on the current equivalent disability benefits. [58509]

Mr. Timms: The estimated additional cost for 2001–02 will be in the region of £60 million. In the longer term we estimate that the cost will rise to £70 million per year.

Widows' Benefits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new claimants of widows' benefit are currently being awarded initial or emergency payments only as a result of the difficulties in implementation of the NIRS2 system. [59284]

Mr. Timms: All new claims to Widows' Benefit (WB) where there is potential entitlement to a weekly Widows' Pension (WP) or Widowed Mother's Allowance (WMA) should be receiving emergency payments as the NIRS contributions record is not available. There are about 4,000 new claims to WB each month. 28,000 claims have been received from April to October of which about 21,000 have entitlement to WP or WMA.

Sources:

Central Data Unit

Annual WB claims 1996–97 = 47,435 of which 37,910 have WP/WMA.

Annual WB claims 1997–98 = 45,291 of which 36,539 have WP/WMA.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if receipt of a compensation payment made on a monthly basis to a person not receiving an occupational pension prevents that individual from being granted jobseeker's allowance when all other application criteria are met; [58531]

(2) if those in receipt of *(a)* a redundancy compensation payment and a continuing annual payment and *(b)* a continuing annual payment only, are eligible for job seekers allowance; [58532]

(3) if those in receipt of a redundancy compensation payment and a continuing annual payment are eligible for unemployment benefit; [58533]

(4) if his Department classifies continuing annual payments as *(a)* a redundancy payment and *(b)* an occupational pension. [58534]

Angela Eagle: Jobseeker's Allowance replaced Unemployment Benefit and Income Support for the unemployed in October 1996 as the main benefit for this group. Jobseeker's Allowance has two elements: a contribution-based allowance for those who have paid sufficient National Insurance contributions and an income-based allowance for those who either do not qualify for, or whose needs are not met by, the contributory element.

Prior to October 1996, for people aged over 55, Unemployment Benefit was reduced by 10p for each 10p of occupational pension received in excess of £35 a week. Other periodic payments from ex-employers made on account of the termination of employment by way of redundancy were treated as income other than earnings and did not affect entitlement to Unemployment Benefit. Lump sum redundancy payments up to the statutory limit did not affect the amount of Unemployment Benefit payable. Any sum paid in excess of this limit removed entitlement to benefit for a period, the length of which depended upon the sum involved.

Contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance is reduced, for all people receiving occupational pension payments, on a penny for penny basis for any excess over £50 a week. Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance is reduced by an amount equal to the total pension payment received. Other periodic payments from ex-employers made on account of the termination of employment by way of redundancy do not affect entitlement to contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance. Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance is, however, reduced by an amount equal to the total payment received.

Lump sum redundancy payments up to the statutory limit do not affect the amount of contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance payable as they are treated as capital. Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance is not affected by capital under £3,000 but entitlement is reduced by £1 for each £250, or part of £250, over that amount up to a limit of £8,000. Benefit is not payable if a person's capital is over that limit. Any sum paid in excess of the statutory limit will remove entitlement to both elements of Jobseeker's Allowance for a period, the length of which depends upon the sum involved.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Teacher Training

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students were recruited to PGCE courses in each subject area for each of the years 1992 to 1998. [56198]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following table shows the number of students recruited to PGCE courses in each subject area for each of the years 1992 to 1997. Recruitment for 1998 is not yet available, but latest figures for acceptances are shown in the table. A package of new measures to boost teacher recruitment was announced on 27 October and details of this have been placed in the Library.

Recruitment[1] to postgraduate initial teacher training (ITT) courses, 1992–93 to 1997–98

England and Wales	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Primary	6,255	6,218	5,640	5,696	5,454	5,217
Mathematics	1,311	1,429	1,651	1,575	1,443	1,233
English[2]	1,388	1,505	1,877	1,932	2,097	2,171
Science	1,928	2,228	2,714	2,686	2,705	2,590
Modern Foreign Languages	1,347	1,573	1,847	1,837	1,789	1,858
Technology[3]	1,008	1,163	1,172	1,034	1,205	1,251
History	616	683	957	936	1,006	1,043
Geography	505	590	674	726	889	888
Physical Education	326	393	538	622	666	844
Art	629	748	805	867	960	962
Music	390	415	464	550	489	482
Religious Education	334	350	427	487	625	636
Other[4]	456	394	316	378	390	300
Total secondary	10,236	11,468	13,442	13,629	14,262	14,258

Live acceptances to postgraduate ITT courses 1998

England and Wales	*1998–99*[5]
Primary	5,690
Mathematics	810
English[2]	2,040
Science	1,880
Modern Foreign Languages	1,560
Technology[3]	1,020
History	930
Geography	750
Physical Education	790
Art	930
Music	420
Religious Education	600
Other[4]	240
Total secondary	11,970

[1] Includes School Centred ITT (SCITT).
[2] English includes Drama.
[3] Technology includes Design and Technology, Information Technology, Business Studies and Home Economics.
[4] Other includes Classics, Economics, other social sciences and other subjects.
[5] Live assceptances at 26 September 1998. Final recruitment figures are expected to be higher by about 5–10 per cent., though this will vary by subject.
Sources:
Recruitment
England: DFE Annual Recruitment Survey 1992–93—1993–94; HESES 1994–95;
TTA Survey of ITT Providers 1995–96—1997–98.
Wales: DFE Annual Recruitment Survey 1992–93—1993–94; Welsh Office 1994–95; HESES 1995–96—1997–98.
Live acceptances
Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR)

Books and Equipment

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* for each local education authority and *(b)* for each Key Stage and for post-16 provision, expenditure per pupil on books and equipment for the most recent year for which figures are available and for each of the preceding two years. [59172]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information on expenditure per pupil on educational equipment, furniture and materials, which covers books and equipment, for each local education authority for the period 1994–95 to 1996–97, the latest year for which figures are available, is set out in a Table, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. Separate information on expenditure per pupil on books and equipment for each Key Stage and for post-16 provision is not available.

The Government have substantially increased provision for local authority spending on education in 1998–99 to £19.4 billion. They have also pledged an extra £19 billion for education throughout the UK in the next three years and provided an extra £2,000 over and above increased RSG levels to purchase books during 1998 to every school with more than 100 pupils in England as part of the National Year of Reading. In addition £102 million will be provided jointly by the Government and local education authorities in 1998–99 for the National Grid for Learning and an additional £954 million for schools capital in 1998–99.

Internet Publishing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy to require all task forces and equivalent bodies sponsored by his Department to publish their working papers and minutes on the Internet. [58771]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The Department is committed to open government and abides by the principles laid down under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

In any dealings with task forces and equivalent bodies we will impress on them our Department's commitment to openness and point out that proposed Freedom of Information legislation may identify and embrace these bodies.

Some of the larger task forces currently publish information on the Internet and any future bodies will be encouraged to consider an Internet site.

Home Economics

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to include home economics in mainstream education. [58962]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Home economics issues are already covered by the National Curriculum. Food and textiles are, for example, covered by National Curriculum design and technology. Further home economics elements are addressed by other National Curriculum subjects. Diet and nutrition are covered by National Curriculum science and budgeting by National Curriculum mathematics. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is currently reviewing the National Curriculum. Proposed changes

will be submitted to the Secretary of State in the spring of next year. There will follow a full consultation on agreed proposals.

Schools (Drug Abuse)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the expenditure by his Department on programmes in schools highlighting the dangers of drug abuse in 1997–98. [58825]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department supported approximately £6 million of expenditure for drug education and prevention work, through the Grants For Education Support and Training (GEST) Programme in 1997–98, increased to £7 million in 1998–99 through the Standards Fund programme. This support was made available to Local Education Authorities, to assist schools in delivering effective drug education and managing drug-related incidents on schools' premises.

In addition, the Department supported £1.5 million of expenditure for the training of youth and community workers, which included among its objectives the effective delivery of programmes of drug education and prevention.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the impact of the Welfare to Work programme to date in the West Midlands. [57735]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* Government Statistical Service figures, covering the period from January 1998 to the end of August 1998, show that in the West Midlands 14,530 young people had started on New Deal and that 1,772 had started unsubsidised employment; 457 subsidised employment; 154 on the Environment Task Force; 136 on the voluntary sector option; and 489 on Full-Time Education and Training option.

We have a comprehensive evaluation programme to measure the impact of New Deal nationally, regionally, and locally. I will publish further detailed findings of this programme as they become available.

Disability Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will announce his proposals for the expenditure of the money allocated to specialist disability services. [58574]

Ms Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced on 28 October 1998, *Official Report* column 340, a fund of an extra £30 million over 3 years to improve job opportunities for disabled people. The money will provide:

- 1,500 additional supported employment places to test new ways of helping disabled people move into open employment and to boost the subsidy to employers;
- extra help with work costs through Access to Work for an additional 4,000 disabled people;
- an increase to the Job Introduction Scheme subsidy from £45 to £75 a week helping to support a further 3,000 opportunities over three years.

In 1999 a range of organisations will be approached with the aim of developing initiatives which will test ways of increasing the scope for progression from the Supported Employment Programme into open employment. The additional help under the Access to Work programme and the Job Introduction Scheme will be managed by the Employment Service as part of their normal support to employers and disabled people.

Early Years Education

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to set a target for the universal provision of early years education for three year olds whose parents want it. [59170]

Ms Hodge: The £390 million additional funding we have made available for England over the next three years will enable the participation rate of three years-olds in early education to approximately double to 66% by 2002. We will consider future targets in the light of this expansion.

New Deal

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statistics he is collecting to monitor the progress of ex-offenders on the New Deal. [59174]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information is available specifically on ex-offenders only for those entering the New Deal early. I can report that 2,294 ex-offenders have entered New Deal early. Monitoring of ex-offenders relies on clients volunteering this information.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Members for Bath and for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) of 30 September 1998, on the education and training option under the New Deal. [59167]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I will be issuing a letter by the end of this week.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have found *(a)* subsidised and *(b)* unsubsidised employment under the New Deal for 18 to 25 year olds in the Tynemouth constituency to date. [59009]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government Statistical Service figures show, to the end of August 1998, that in the Employment Service Tyneside North Unit of Delivery, which covers the Tynemouth constituency, 62 18–24 year olds have found unsubsidised employment and 29 have started on the New Deal employment option.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* the employers currently employing New Deal trainees under the subsidised employment option and *(b)* for each (i) how many New Deal trainees they are employing and (ii) what percentage their New Deal trainees are of their total workforce. [59173]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Across the country, around 29,300 companies have been signed up to New Deal. The current Employment Service systems do not allow us to monitor number of starts on the Employment Option by employer. We are currently looking at setting up an employer database that will allow us to monitor New Deal information by employer.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of subsidised unfilled vacancies for New Deal trainees. [59171]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Employment Service information systems cannot provide this information.

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many disabled job seekers have *(a)* sought help under the New Deal, *(b)* found suitable programmes and *(c)* moved on to permanent employment or longer-term training. [59078]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Government Statistical Service figures of people with disabilities show that, to the end of August 1998, *(a)* 19,880 have entered New Deal, *(b)* 360 have entered the Voluntary Sector Option, and 280 have entered the Environment Task Force Option, *(c)* 1,090 have moved from Gateway to the Subsidised Employment Option and 2,100 have signed-off to start unsubsidised jobs and 940 participants have entered the Full-Time Education and Training Option.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have found employment through the New Deal to date *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each target group. [57143]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 29 October 1998]:* Latest figures, combining GSS figures to August with provisional management information to September, show that, since New Deal for 18–24 year olds started, over 30,000 young people have found work. Of these, 21,460 have gone into unsubsidised jobs and 9,020 have entered subsidised employment.

Figures for New Deal 25+ will be available in the Government Statistical Service's statistical First Release, which will be published in December.

No figures are available yet for the success of the New Deal for Lone Parents since its National launch on 26 October. Information from the pilot areas combined with provision for new claimants up to 25 September show 5,439 lone parents have moved into jobs or increased their hours of work.

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many 18 to 24 year olds who left the New Deal for non-subsidised employment had returned to the New Deal programme by 30 September. [57871]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 29 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *230*.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by outcome, for those delivery units for which the information is available, the numbers of young people who have left the New Deal to date. [59177]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The latest Government Statistical Service figures show that the total number of people leaving New Deal to the end of August is 32,080. Of these, 17,300 have entered unsubsidised employment, 3,470 have transferred to alternative benefits, 1,810 have gone to other known destinations. The destinations of the remaining 9,510 is unknown. Breakdowns for the 143 individual Units of Delivery can be found in the Library.

GSS statistics to the end of September will be published on 26 November.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the costs incurred centrally in supporting the early implementation of the New Deal for young people. [59168]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The central costs incurred by the Employment Service and DfEE to the 30 September 1998 in supporting the early stages of the introduction of New Deal amount to £45.6 million. This includes infrastructure costs, preparation and implementation costs and Marketing costs.

Schools

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received about the policy of naming and shaming schools; and if he will make a statement. [58542]

Ms Estelle Morris: The names of schools which have been found by OFSTED to be failing their pupils, or to have serious weaknesses, are a matter of public record, as are those which have received good reports. All inspection reports are published and are available on the Internet.

There is general agreement that failing schools must be identified and tackled urgently in the interests of their pupils. In May 1997 the Government found a number of schools which had been under special measures for up to three years and took action to ensure that these schools were turned round, closed or given a fresh start. All schools coming into special measures from September 1998 will have two years to improve, be closed or, in exceptional circumstances, given a fresh start. Local authorities with schools which have now been on special measures for over two years have been asked to submit plans for urgent action. The Secretary of State will not hesitate to use his new power to direct the closure of such schools if that is necessary to ensure pupils have the quality of education they deserve. When such action is taken, it will be made public.

Study or Training Leave

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) when he expects the right to time off for study or training to become available to 16 and 17 year olds; [57679]

(2) when he expects the regulations surrounding the right to time off for study or training for 16 and 17 year olds to come into force. [57680]

Mr. Mudie: We are working towards an implementation date of September 1999 for Part III of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (Right to Time Off for Study or Training).

Course Vacancies (UCAS)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many course vacancies existed in the institutions engaged in the UCAS scheme immediately following the UCAS clearing procedure in *(a)* Autumn 1998, *(b)* Autumn 1997, *(c)* Autumn 1996 and *(d)* Autumn 1995. [58979]

Mr. Mudie: Although throughout clearing Universities and Colleges notify UCAS which courses have vacancies and these appear in the national press and elsewhere, they do not declare the number of vacancies. Figures for the number of vacancies are therefore not available centrally.

Jobfinder's Grant

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans he has to extend the jobfinder's grant to people who work fewer than 30 hours a week; [58878]

(2) what plans he has to extend the jobfinder's grant to non-New Deal applicants. [58879]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Jobfinder's Grant has always been available to jobseekers unemployed 2 years or more since its introduction as a national programme in April 1995.

Jobfinder's Grant is a one-off payment of a grant of £200 paid at the discretion of Employment Service Client Advisers who decide if the grant is required to help with the client's transition back to work.

During 1998, eligibility was extended to all New Deal participants. Due to the range of opportunities available on New Deal 18–24 it was decided to make Jobfinder's Grant available at Employment Service District Manager discretion.

I am currently considering whether to extend the Jobfinder's Grant to people who work fewer than 30 hours per week. Indeed all Employment Service programmes and services, including Jobfinder's Grant, are constantly being evaluated to look at ways of enhancing the provision to meet unemployed jobseekers' needs in the ever changing labour market.

Science Exam Results

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the grades achieved at *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* A level in each science subject in (i) schools and (ii) further education colleges in Staffordshire in each of the last five years. [57945]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 4 November 1998]:* The GCSE and GCE A level data requested for schools and colleges in Staffordshire are shown in the following tables.

GCSE and GCE A level achievements in Staffordshire 1993 to 1997

(i) (a) GCSE achievements in maintained schools

	Grade achieved at GCSE										
	*A**	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*U*	*X*	*Total*
1993											
Biology	—	8	21	52	47	40	23	6	2	10	209
Chemistry	—	7	26	30	33	12	2	2	0	0	112
Physics	—	11	22	31	30	18	5	2	0	1	120
Single science	—	25	61	130	257	323	358	183	84	46	1,467
Double award science	—	781	1,030	1,799	1,737	1,499	999	414	126	78	8,463
Other science	—	9	102	175	161	148	70	17	0	23	705
1994											
Biology	2	17	24	37	55	22	12	4	2	3	178
Chemistry	6	11	23	31	26	10	3	0	0	3	113
Physics	5	17	17	22	11	20	3	0	0	1	96
Single science	2	18	54	90	227	197	108	54	30	75	855
Double award science	224	629	1,469	1,735	2,265	1,568	835	298	95	244	9,362
Other science	0	2	9	22	27	22	10	3	4	1	100
1995											
Biology	2	4	15	12	15	17	7	2	3	0	77
Chemistry	0	3	11	9	7	5	2	0	1	0	38
Physics	0	5	11	7	6	6	1	1	0	0	37
Single science	1	10	59	103	191	205	135	43	26	47	820
Double award science	338	657	1,560	2,089	2,378	1,796	978	275	128	275	10,474
Other science	0	1	1	16	19	14	10	4	2	3	70
1996											
Biology	7	25	48	44	26	23	6	0	0	0	179
Chemistry	4	27	35	54	27	13	6	0	1	0	167
Physics	9	23	51	38	21	13	9	0	3	0	167
Single science	2	26	91	133	247	216	135	59	26	52	987
Double award science	300	808	1,667	2,130	2,192	1,705	1,039	328	165	262	10,596
Other science	0	1	7	13	32	24	23	3	8	5	116
1997											
Biology	15	42	61	36	10	10	4	1	4	1	184
Chemistry	18	41	53	37	8	4	6	0	1	0	168
Physics	16	42	54	38	10	6	3	0	0	1	170
Single science	2	12	75	68	158	135	83	34	16	28	611
Double award science	279	570	1,355	1,750	1,791	1,314	705	187	109	185	8,248
Other science	0	1	5	9	31	27	19	4	3	1	100

(i) (b) GCE A level achievements in maintained schools

	Grade achieved at GCE A level								
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*N*	*U*	*X*	*Total*
1993									
Biology	51	63	68	77	89	70	82	0	500
Chemistry	62	68	59	75	78	50	52	1	445
Physics	56	43	61	67	94	72	46	0	439
Other science	6	16	16	37	31	23	9	0	138
1994									
Biology	40	61	92	92	117	93	45	1	541
Chemistry	50	63	70	81	101	52	43	2	462
Physics	54	55	59	88	72	50	33	3	414
Other science	6	12	22	46	36	24	7	0	153
1995									
Biology	41	74	82	89	103	81	50	3	527
Chemistry	45	66	73	83	64	64	38	1	435
Physics	50	46	69	76	53	43	21	0	358
Other science	7	21	26	50	28	13	5	2	152
1996									
Biology	40	99	102	111	109	64	41	4	570
Chemistry	56	67	103	64	73	61	34	0	458
Physics	49	60	55	58	85	57	31	0	395
Other science	4	20	20	31	26	9	5	0	115
1997									
Biology	65	102	89	88	113	68	33	5	563
Chemistry	59	80	83	60	58	38	36	1	415
Physics	60	67	62	58	70	32	20	2	371
Other science	4	19	29	36	25	16	4	0	133

GCSE and GCE A level achievements in Staffordshire 1993 to 1997

(ii) (a) GCSE achievements in FE sector colleges

	Grade achieved at GCSE										
	*A**	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*U*	*X*	*Total*
1993											
Biology	—	24	45	108	97	92	59	44	18	34	521
Chemistry	—	1	16	21	18	15	8	1	0	7	87
Physics	—	5	7	21	17	15	7	5	7	5	89
Single science	—	7	12	25	16	7	3	5	1	10	86
Double award science	—	5	17	13	7	3	0	1	1	4	51
Other science	—	23	48	55	20	19	4	3	1	13	186
1994											
Biology	5	18	58	114	110	97	58	36	13	67	576
Chemistry	0	4	16	18	18	16	6	1	2	10	91
Physics	0	6	10	22	25	15	7	6	1	14	106
Single science	0	1	17	24	13	14	9	0	1	12	91
Double award science	0	0	10	17	9	8	0	0	1	2	47
Other science	3	22	54	36	15	9	7	2	1	16	165
1995											
Biology	2	22	41	79	74	61	3	2	35	42	361
Chemistry	0	1	5	19	17	9	3	0	2	7	63
Physics	1	6	8	15	9	7	3	0	0	6	55
Single science	0	0	9	11	10	9	1	0	0	5	45
Double award science	0	2	14	17	9	9	0	0	1	1	53
Other science	3	15	34	31	8	10	0	2	0	16	119
1996											
Biology	1	14	44	85	72	49	5	0	20	41	331
Chemistry	0	1	8	20	14	16	6	0	2	9	76
Physics	0	1	9	18	12	3	2	0	2	8	55
Single science	0	0	3	12	7	4	3	0	2	3	34
Double award science	0	2	6	15	7	4	2	0	0	3	39
Other science	4	13	32	27	10	2	1	0	9	20	118
1997											
Biology	1	10	34	42	52	32	2	1	8	27	209
Chemistry	0	2	1	6	5	5	0	0	1	6	26
Physics	0	1	4	5	4	2	0	0	0	2	18
Single science	0	2	1	4	3	3	1	0	0	2	16
Double award science	0	0	7	2	4	1	0	0	0	3	17
Other science	0	2	1	5	5	0	0	0	2	4	19

(ii) (b) GCE A level achievements in FE sector colleges

	Grade achieved at GCE A level								
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*N*	*U*	*X*	*Total*
1993									
Biology	20	37	46	42	47	37	59	16	304
Chemistry	22	30	21	22	25	22	20	3	165
Physics	18	23	20	17	28	25	29	4	164
Other science	12	35	38	52	51	29	58	19	294
1994									
Biology	23	22	38	70	56	46	36	12	303
Chemistry	26	22	22	28	27	19	19	3	166
Physics	17	19	25	18	22	18	26	2	147
Other science	16	34	43	50	41	29	46	22	281
1995									
Biology	25	24	45	72	76	45	69	21	377
Chemistry	23	19	19	33	42	30	28	5	199
Physics	15	15	25	22	43	17	16	3	156
Other science	13	34	27	67	60	31	30	17	279
1996									
Biology	9	39	46	63	67	41	35	14	314
Chemistry	11	23	27	20	27	25	23	7	163
Physics	7	10	20	15	24	21	28	4	129
Other science	6	12	35	36	26	28	28	7	178
1997									
Biology	3	11	18	27	34	21	35	13	171
Chemistry	1	8	4	7	9	10	1	3	43
Physics	5	3	6	10	14	0	6	10	54
Other science	9	17	14	24	22	13	16	7	122

Millennium Bug Busters

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many millennium bug busters are currently in post. [59220]

Mr. Mudie: As at 5 November, 253 people had completed training under the Bug Busters Programme. 430 had started training and a further 1,294 were booked to go on courses.

Further Education (Business Links)

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to restrict off site collaborative provision between colleges, universities and business. [56698]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is concerned to ensure high quality and value for money in collaborative arrangements between further education colleges and business. In furtherance of these objectives, the Further Education Funding Council has made changes in the arrangements for such provision with effect from 1 August. First, colleges are prohibited from transferring funding to employers as part of a collaborative arrangement to provide education and training to their employees, except for the hire of equipment or premises. In addition, the funding guidance for 1998–99 stresses the need for colleges to address identified growth in their local communities. Should colleges seek to operate outside their local area, they would be expected to liaise with colleges in the locality concerned, thereby eliminating unhelpful and wasteful competition.

As regards higher education, we have no plans to restrict universities' collaborative arrangements with business.

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997; [56743]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997. [56745]

Mr. Mudie: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report,* columns *666–70.*

Young Offenders (Profiles)

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what data he has collated on the ability profiles of young offenders. [59077]

Mr. George Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

The Prison Service collates information on literacy and numeracy standards among prisoners from basic skills

screening tests carried out near the beginning of sentences. The tests are not compulsory and not all prisoners are screened. The results of the basic skills assessments in 1997 for juveniles and young offenders are given in the table.

There are no centrally collated statistics across the probation service in England and Wales concerning the ability profiles of young offenders.

Juvenile/young prisoners basic skills assessment tests—1997

		Standard (%) [1]		
Test	*Number tested*	*Below level 1*	*At level 1*	*Above level 1*
Literacy	8,697	30	38.5	31.5
Numeracy	8,633	43.6	38.8	17.6

[1] Standard: Level 1 indicates basic functionality in literacy and/or numeracy, above level 1 is higher while below level 1 indicates a clear deficit in literacy and/or numeracy

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Objective 5A

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many claims for funding the UK has made under Objective 5A for modernisation in agriculture, in each of the last three financial years. [56485]

Mr. Morley: Aid for on-farm investments was implemented in the UK through the Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme. Although the scheme closed to new applications in 1994, grant continues to be paid on planned investments. The UK has made a claim in each of the last three years to the European Commission for expenditure incurred in the previous calendar year as shown in the table.

£ million

Year	*Amount claimed*
1995	2.6
1996	2.0
1997	1.3

Countryside Stewardship

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the maximum amount of money the UK is entitled to reclaim from EU funds under the Stewardship Scheme for 1998–99. [56487]

Mr. Morley: We expect to be able to reclaim a maximum of £5.8 million from the EU for Countryside Stewardship in 1998–99.

Pigs

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he has taken to provide assistance for the pig rearing industry during the last three months; and if he will make a statement. [56923]

Mr. Morley: In the last three months the Government have supported all measures proposed by the EU Commission to meet the present crisis. These include:

re-introducing export refunds on fresh and frozen bone-in carcase meat and extending the payment of export refunds to boneless cuts;

a further increase in the rates of export refunds on fresh and frozen carcase meat as from 15 October, this time by around 30 per cent.;

following the UK pig industry, the introduction of an Aids to Private Storage Scheme as from 28 September.

all Ministers have had regular meetings with pig industry representatives.

In addition, my Ministerial colleague, Lord Donoughue, hosted a pigmeat seminar on 7 July which was aimed at caterers. This was the first part of a programme of events that seeks to improve communication and understanding between the domestic pigmeat industry and the catering and food service sector. The second stage of the campaign, a seminar for 16 November, when Lord Donoughue will again take part. The ultimate objective of this programme is to increase the usage of pigmeat products in the important catering sector, thereby improving market opportunities for UK pig producers.

I and my Ministerial colleagues will use this and every other opportunity, including our regular meetings with the retail and processing sectors and Parliamentary debates, to make it known that the British pig industry produces a quality product to high welfare and other standards. It is of the utmost importance for this to be fully appreciated and taken into account by processors, retailers, caterers and the final consumer.

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of piglet mortality rates in the United Kingdom, and of the economic value this represents. [57925]

Mr. Rooker: A MAFF founded survey of pig producers co-ordinated by the University of Exeter estimated the average rate of pre-weaned piglet mortality in England for 1996–97 at 12.4 per cent. This represented a cost to the producer of about £1.30 per finished pig.

Calf Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the scheduled end of the calf slaughter scheme on the beef market. [57297]

Mr. Rooker: We expect that some of the calves which might have been slaughtered under the Calf Processing Aid Scheme will be slaughtered on farm, some will be slaughtered as young calves for pet food and some reared for beef. We do not anticipate any significant effect on the UK beef market. Closing the Scheme on 30 November, as we have announced, will not affect the beef market until the beginning of the year 2000 when the calves reared as beef start to come on the market.

BSE

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the costs of the current BSE inquiry. [57085]

Mr. Rooker: The estimated direct cost of the BSE Inquiry is £10 million, excluding departmental costs and legal support for departmental witnesses.

Meat and Dairy Prices

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish figures to show the typical relationship between prices paid by shoppers in supermarkets and prices paid to British producers for a range of meat and dairy products. [57293]

Mr. Rooker: The Ministry does not hold or publish figures showing the relationship between prices paid by shoppers in supermarkets and prices paid to British producers for meat and diary products. Figures for the farm to retail price spread for beef, lamb, pork and bacon are published by the Meat and Livestock Commission in "UK Market Survey—Monthly Supplement", copies of which are in the House Library.

Meat Inspection Standards

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of standards of meat inspection carried out in other EU countries. [57725]

Mr. Rooker: All fresh meat produced in the EU which is intended to be sold for human consumption must be produced in accordance with EU harmonised hygiene rules. Amongst other things these rules require full ante-mortem and post-mortem checks by official veterinarians. We do not have specific information on the standard of meat inspection in other EU countries. It is for the competent authority in each Member State to ensure that such rules are followed in practice and it is the European Commission's responsibility to ensure that individual Member States comply with their Community obligations. The Commission's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) carries out regular programmes of inspection visits to all Member States. If necessary, the Commission will take infraction proceedings against those Member States whose arrangements are considered inadequate. Reports of FVO visits are published on the Commission's website on the Internet (hhtp://europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/health/vi/reports). A list of the relevant reports will appear each month in MAFF's Meat Hygiene Enforcement Report and BSE Enforcement Bulletin.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the value of hill livestock compensatory allowances in current prices for each year since 1975 for *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [57500]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* The following tables give the information requested in respect of both HLCA payment rates and HLCA expenditure. The rates for the Severely Disadvantaged Area and Disadvantaged Area apply throughout the UK. Additional supplements are paid in the Severely Disadvantaged Area which falls within the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) region of Scotland. Payments in the Disadvantaged Area and the HIE supplements commenced in 1985. Expenditure data for 1976–78 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Rates of hill livestock compensatory allowance 1976–98

£

	Severely Disadvantaged Area						*Disadvantaged Area*			
Year	*Rate per cow*	*(at 1998 prices)*	*Higher rate ewe*	*(at 1998 prices)*	*Lower rate ewe*	*(at 1998 prices)*	*Rate per cow*	*(at 1998 prices)*	*Rate per ewe*	*(at 1998 prices)*
1976	29.00	118.59	3.60	14.72	2.85	11.65	—	—	—	—
1977	29.00	102.37	3.60	12.71	2.85	10.06	—	—	—	—
1978	29.00	94.56	3.60	11.74	2.85	9.29	—	—	—	—
1979	29.00	83.37	4.10	11.79	2.85	8.19	—	—	—	—
1980	35.00	85.30	5.50	13.40	4.25	10.36	—	—	—	—
1981	42.50	92.58	6.25	13.61	4.25	9.26	—	—	—	—
1982	44.50	89.26	6.25	12.54	4.25	8.52	—	—	—	—
1983	44.50	85.32	6.25	11.98	4.25	8.15	—	—	—	—
1984	44.50	81.29	6.25	11.42	4.25	7.76	—	—	—	—
1985	54.50	93.85	6.25	10.76	4.25	7.32	22.25	38.32	2.12	3.65
1986	54.50	90.75	6.75	11.24	4.50	7.49	27.25	45.37	2.25	3.75
1987	54.50	87.14	6.75	10.79	4.50	7.20	27.25	43.57	2.25	3.60
1988	54.50	83.06	6.75	10.29	4.50	6.86	27.25	41.53	2.25	3.43
1989	54.50	77.06	6.75	9.54	4.50	6.36	27.25	38.53	2.25	3.18
1990	54.50	70.39	7.50	9.69	4.50	5.81	27.25	35.19	2.25	2.91
1991	63.30	77.23	8.75	10.68	4.90	5.98	31.65	38.62	2.45	2.99
1992	63.30	74.45	8.75	10.29	4.90	5.76	31.65	37.23	2.45	2.88
1993	63.30	73.31	6.50	7.53	3.60	4.17	31.65	36.65	2.86	3.31
1994	47.50	53.68	5.75	6.50	3.00	3.39	[1]23.75	26.84	2.44	2.76
1995	47.50	51.91	5.75	6.28	3.00	3.28	23.75	25.95	2.44	2.67
1996	47.50	50.67	5.75	6.13	3.00	3.20	23.75	25.33	2.65	2.83
1997	[1]97.50	100.84	5.75	5.95	3.00	3.10	[1]69.75	72.14	2.65	2.74
1998	47.30	47.50	5.75	5.75	3.00	3.00	23.75	23.75	2.65	2.65

[1] Rate increased as a result of BSE-related special aid

HLCA expenditure 1979–98

£ million

Year	England Actual	England (at 1998 prices)	Wales Actual	Wales (at 1998 prices)	Scotland Actual	Scotland (at 1998 prices)	Northern Ireland Actual	Northern Ireland (at 1998 prices)	Total UK Actual	Total UK (at 1998 prices)
1979	13.5	38.8	14.6	42.0	23.7	68.1	5.5	15.8	57.4	165.0
1980	18.5	45.1	19.8	48.3	31.4	76.5	7.1	17.3	76.8	187.2
1981	21.5	46.8	22.8	49.7	35.0	76.2	8.2	17.9	87.5	190.6
1982	22.1	44.3	23.4	46.9	35.7	71.6	8.4	16.8	89.6	179.7
1983	22.6	43.3	23.8	45.6	35.9	68.8	8.5	16.3	90.8	174.1
1984	22.7	41.5	23.9	43.7	36.0	65.8	8.7	15.9	91.4	167.0
1985	24.0	41.3	25.2	43.4	37.8	65.1	10.1	17.4	97.0	167.0
1986	27.3	45.5	28.7	47.8	42.9	71.4	12.5	20.8	111.4	185.5
1987	28.4	45.4	28.6	45.7	43.1	68.9	12.7	20.3	112.8	180.4
1988	29.1	44.4	31.3	47.7	43.6	66.5	12.9	19.7	117.0	178.3
1989	29.3	41.4	30.2	42.7	45.1	63.8	13.6	19.2	118.2	167.1
1990	32.5	42.0	32.9	42.5	48.0	62.0	15.1	19.5	128.5	166.0
1999	37.2	45.4	36.2	44.2	56.1	68.4	17.7	21.6	147.2	179.6
1992	38.4	45.2	38.2	44.9	56.9	66.9	19.1	22.5	152.7	179.6
1993	33.4	38.7	29.7	34.4	50.7	58.7	18.6	21.5	132.4	153.3
1994	27.5	31.1	27.1	30.6	40.7	46.0	14.7	16.6	110.0	124.3
1995	27.2	29.7	27.1	29.6	39.4	43.1	14.0	15.3	107.6	117.6
1996	27.1	28.9	26.9	28.7	38.6	41.2	14.5	15.5	107.1	114.2
1997[1]	41.4	42.8	35.8	37.0	62.5	64.6	27.8	28.8	167.5	173.2
1998	25.4	25.4	24.1	24.1	38.7	38.7	13.0	13.0	101.3	101.3

[1] Includes approximately £60 million of BSE-related special aid

Source:
HLCA autumn review tables; totals may not add due to rounding; 1998 figures are provisional

HLCA supplements in the Scottish Highlands and Islands Enterprise region 1985–98

£

Year	Rate per cow by land classification Grade A	(at 1998 prices)	Grade B	(at 1998 prices)	Grade C	(at 1998 prices)	Rate per ewe Rate	(at 1998 prices)
1985	2.50	4.31	9.50	16.36	13.00	22.39	0.55	0.95
1986	3.05	5.08	7.98	13.29	7.98	13.29	0.58	0.97
1987	3.05	4.88	9.69	15.49	9.69	15.49	0.58	0.93
1988	3.05	4.65	11.59	17.66	12.72	19.39	0.58	0.88
1989	3.05	4.31	11.59	16.39	14.68	20.76	0.58	0.82
1990	3.05	3.94	11.59	14.97	15.86	20.48	0.64	0.83
1991	3.05	3.72	11.59	14.14	14.03	17.12	0.64	0.78
1992	3.05	3.59	11.59	13.63	15.86	18.65	0.64	0.75
1993	3.05	3.53	11.59	13.42	15.86	18.37	0.64	0.74
1994	3.05	3.45	11.59	13.10	15.86	17.92	0.64	0.72
1995	3.05	3.33	11.59	12.67	15.86	17.33	0.64	0.70
1996	3.05	3.25	11.59	12.36	15.86	16.92	0.64	0.68
1997	[1]6.26	6.47	[1]23.79	24.61	[1]32.55	33.67	0.64	0.66
1998	3.05	3.05	11.59	11.59	15.86	15.86	0.64	0.64

[1] Rate increased as a result of BSE-related special aid

Quarantine Exemptions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many exemptions have been given from quarantine regulations for cats and dogs over the last year; and on what grounds. [58661]

Mr. Rooker: None. However, commercially traded cats and dogs imported into the UK from EU Member States are exempt from quarantine if they can comply with the requirements of Council Directive 92/65/EEC. This allows commercially traded cats and dogs to be imported into the UK without the need to enter quarantine providing they: have been born on and kept on the holding of origin since birth; have been vaccinated against rabies when at least 3 months old; have remained in the Member State of origin for at least 6 months following vaccination against rabies; have undergone a blood test following vaccination to ensure that the rabies vaccination has been effective; are permanently identified; and are accompanied by a health certificate signed by an official veterinarian of the Member State of Origin verifying compliance with the requirements of the Directive. Further checks on compliance are conducted following each animal's arrival in the UK. 95 dogs and 22 cats were imported into the UK in 1997 in accordance with these requirements.

Slaughterhouses (Stunning)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to amend the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 to introduce a maximum stunning to sticking interval for *(a)* pigs, *(b)* sheep and *(c)* cattle; and if he will make a statement. [58168]

Mr. Morley: The Government have no immediate plans to amend the Regulations in this way. However, we await the European Commission's proposals to amend Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. As Community rules apply in this area, we believe that changes, such as the introduction of maximum stunning to sticking intervals for head-only electrically stunned animals, are best addressed in the context of developing those rules. We continue to press the Commission to bring forward their proposals.

Farm Subsidies

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the total value of subsidies, in current prices, paid to farmers in the United Kingdom for each of the last 10 years through *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the European Union. [57506]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The total value of payments to farmers made through this Department in each of the last 10 years is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1988–89	294
1989–90	305
1990–91	358
1991–92	393
1992–93	568
1993–94	1,307
1994–95	1,444
1995–96	1,729
1996–97	1,794
1997–98	1,547

Most of these payments are in respect of EU-funded CAP and environmental measures.

Information on payments made direct to farmers by the EU is not held centrally.

Recreational Fishing

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many licences his Department has issued for recreational fishing under Part 2 of the Merchant Fishing Act 1995; and if he will make a statement on the percentage of the British quota allowed for recreational fishing; [57948]

(2) if he will exempt recreational boats from periodic MAFF species bans; [57949]

(3) when he proposes to introduce a register for recreational fishing; and how many staff will be employed by his Department to administer these records. [57950]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* European Union regulations on annual total allowable catches and quotas require that all landings be counted against a Member State's share of the total allowable catch for each quota stock. All vessels over 10 metres in overall length which fish for profit are required to submit landing declarations for quota stocks. The landings made by all other vessels, including fishing vessels of 10 metres and under in overall length, and for which separate quota allocations operate in the United Kingdom, are monitored by Fisheries Departments. Where allocations are exhausted steps are taken to prohibit further landings unless additional quota allocation can be made available. However, this does not prevent recreational anglers from fishing provided they return their catch to the sea. Occasionally temporary closures may operate to ensure that sufficient allocation is held back for seasonal fisheries.

Separate allocations are not made in respect of vessels exclusively engaged in recreational fishing. Nor are such vessels licensed by the Fisheries Departments under the provisions of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 and we have no plans to do so. The registration of vessels under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 is a matter for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Hens (Welfare)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will encourage EU Agriculture ministers to support a ban on battery cages for egg-laying hens. [58293]

Mr. Morley: We have made clear our view that the EU should set an early date for the phasing out of the battery cage and will continue to press for this in the ongoing EU negotiations.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the proposed EU directive on the welfare of egg-laying hens. [58295]

Mr. Morley: We have received a number of written representations and have met with industry representatives and welfare organisations to discuss the proposals.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the additional costs to UK consumers of an EU-wide ban on battery cages for egg-laying hens. [58296]

Mr. Morley: The EU Commission estimate that the significant changes they propose in the standards for caged hens will cost between 1.2 and 1.56 ecu (80p—£1.11p) per EU consumer per annum. No estimate has been made of the additional cost to consumers of a ban. In practice this would depend on a number of factors including the available supply of shell egg and retail contracts.

Badgers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the badger population of England and Wales. [58592]

Mr. Rooker: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made no direct estimates of the badger population of England and Wales. A report to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1995) based on surveys carried out in 1988 for the Nature Conservancy Council suggested pre-breeding badger population sizes of 195,000 in England and 35,000 in Wales. A report by the People's Trust for Endangered Species (1997) suggest that badger activity in Britain increased by 77 per cent. between 1988 and 1997. I understand those responsible for producing these figures are reviewing them, although no revisions have been published yet.

Farmers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers have taken early retirement in each of the last 10 years; and what estimate he has made for the figure in 1998–99. [57937]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* Figures are not available. There has been no Government funded early retirement scheme for farmers in the UK in the last 10 years, nor will there be one in 1998–99.

Exports (Russia)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the total values, in current prices, of UK agricultural exports to Russia for each year since 1992; and what estimate he has made of the figure for 1998 to 1999. [57931]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The table shows the value at current prices (prices at the time of trade), as recorded by the Overseas Trade Statistics of total agricultural exports to Russia between 1992 and 1997:

Year	*£ million*
1992	97.347
1993	208.169
1994	148.029
1995	136.225
1996	119.118
1997	157.479

Note:
The January-August 1998 figure is £105.319 million. No estimate has been made for 1999.

Flood Prevention

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will increase funding to the Environment Agency for flood prevention measures. [58677]

Mr. Morley: Funding of the Environment Agency's expenditure on flood defence is met mainly by levies on local authorities. The cost of the levies is reflected in local authorities' Standard Spending Assessments (part of the Revenue Support Grant settlement). Capital works are also eligible for MAFF grant. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, MAFF is making £23 million of additional funding available over the next three years for capital works. The distribution of this funding between operating authorities (of which the Environment Agency is one) will depend on the relative urgency and priority of their planned works.

Sheep Quota

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many complaints his Department has received about allocation of sheep quota from the national reserve; what was the total amount of compensation *(a)* offered and *(b)* paid to complainants in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [58676]

Mr. Rooker: Extraction of information on complaints by farmers referring to sheep quota national reserve allocations could be achieved only at disproportionate cost. No compensation has been offered or paid as a result of complaints made direct to the Department about sheep quota national reserve allocations.

Ragwort

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give further guidance to highway authorities and landowners on the containment of ragwort. [58538]

Mr. Morley: The Highways Agency seeks to control ragwort on the trunkroad network in accordance with a code of practice for routine maintenance.

General advice on control of injurious weeds, including ragwort, is available from MAFF Regional Service Centres. I am actively considering ways in which this could be more effective.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Syms: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vets are employed by the Meat Hygiene Service; and how many of these are foreign nationals. [58491]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *600*.

Food Standards Agency

Ms Shipley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whom the Government have consulted on the funding of the Food Standards Agency. [58993]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The White Paper 'The Food Standards Agency: A Force for Change' set out the Government's proposals for funding the Agency. This has been the subject of full public consultation and discussion with a wide range of organisations and individuals. The Government will consult further at the next stage on detailed proposals for recovering the new costs associated with the Agency from the food industry in a way that is administratively simple and fair to small businesses.

Agriculture

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the written representations he has received from Labour hon. Members in each of the last three months about problems facing the United Kingdom agricultural industry asked him to take action to help the industry. [58985]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* We have received a large number of written representations on the current difficulties of a range of sectors. Many of these representations have called for measures targeted at the current situation, a look at longer term issues and for a constructive dialogue both with our EU partners and within the UK.

Genetically Modified Seeds

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that no genetically modified seed will be proposed for inclusion on the

national seed list unless and until a marketing consent for that seed has been granted under Part C of Directive 90/220. [59045]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Marketing of the main agricultural and horticultural species cannot take place until a variety has been added to the UK National List or the EU Common Catalogue. For genetically modified varieties, marketing is also dependent on the promulgation of a marketing consent under Directive 90/220/EEC. National Listing would not, therefore, on its own, be sufficient to permit the marketing of a genetically modified plant variety. It is currently MAFF policy not to propose the addition of genetically modified plant varieties to the National List unless and until the relevant consent has been promulgated under 90/220/EEC.

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the Minister for Energy in the Republic of Ireland concerning the commissioning of the mixed oxide plant at Sellafield; and what response he has made. [59212]

Mr. Rooker: A letter has recently been received from Joe Jacob, T. D., Minister of State, Department of Public Enterprise, Republic of Ireland, expressing concern about the Environment Agency's proposed decisions to Government on the Sellafield Discharge Authorisations and the operation of the Mixed Oxide plant at Sellafield. The letter has been passed on to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment for a joint reply on behalf of both Ministers.

Potato Seed Testing

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the dates on which he or his predecessors have exercised the power under Regulation 11(3)(c)(ii) of the Seed (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982 (as amended) to require the testing of potato seeds for disease, pest resistance, general characteristics and consumer quality; and if he will provide details of each such occasion and the reasons for it; [59043]

(2) for what reasons he is proposing to abolish his power to require the testing of potato seeds for disease, pest resistance, general characteristics and consumer quality under Regulation 11(3)(c)(ii) of the Seed (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982 (as amended). [59044]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The tests for disease and pest resistance, general characteristics and consumer quality required in regulation 11(3)(c)(ii) of the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982 (as amended), have been published annually in the September and/or October edition of the *Plant Varieties and Seeds Gazette* since 1985.

This requirement was introduced in 1985 for potatoes for the same reasons as the other requirements of regulation 11(3)—that is to encourage breeders to screen varieties before entering them in to the statutory system and to deter them from entering varieties which had little chance of addition to the National List, at a time when the trialling system was overloaded and heavily subsidised. Some limited use may have been made of such data to persuade applicants to withdraw applications with little chance of success.

A fundamental review of the National List trials system was undertaken in 1992, in consultation with plant breeders. Following this, a streamlined system of trials for Value for Cultivation and Use (VCU) was introduced. This addressed the problems arising from the volume of applications for addition to the National List. The staged reintroduction of fees for official VCU trials in 1994 and 1995 reinforced the measures already taken to streamline the system. The requirement to submit the results of tests required pursuant to regulation 11(3)(c)(ii) had no value once the pressure on the system was relieved. A requirement to provide information which serves no purpose and which is not used places an unnecessary and unjustifiable burden on applicants. I therefore propose to revoke regulation 11(3)(c)(ii) for the same reason as I propose to revoke the rest of regulation 11(3).

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 12 November 1998

HOME DEPARTMENT

Senator Pinochet

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received a formal extradition request for Senator Pinochet via diplomatic channels. [59966]

Mr. Straw: I received a formal request for the extradition of Senator Pinochet from the Spanish Government on 11 November 1998. The request was submitted through diplomatic channels.

Video Recordings

Mrs. Fiona Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to make any changes to the authority responsible for making arrangements for the classification of video works under the Video Recordings Act 1984; and if he will make a statement. [59967]

Mr. Straw: I have today laid before both Houses details of my proposal to designate Lord Taylor of Warwick and Ms Janet Lewis Jones under section 4(4) of the Video Recordings Act 1984. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) earlier today announced their intention to appoint Lord Taylor and Janet Lewis Jones, subject to Parliamentary approval of the designation under section 4(4), as their Vice-Presidents. I propose to designate them, in that capacity, to replace Monica Sims.

I have placed in the Library a copy of my designation proposal and the text of the letters I intend to send at the time of designation to Lord Taylor and Janet Lewis Jones.

I believe that Lord Taylor and Janet Lewis Jones have the necessary understanding of the issues relating to the responsibility of a designated authority and I expect them, along with the President, Andreas Whittam Smith, to provide strong leadership for the BBFC.

Convicted Murderers

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of convicted murderers who *(a)* have served and been released and *(b)* who are in prison and expect to serve (i) less than their tariff, (ii) their tariff and (iii) a period greater than their tariff; and in the latter case, what was the median period by which their period served exceeded their tariff. [59399]

Mr. George Howarth: The readily available information relates to all life sentence prisoners, both mandatory and discretionary. No such prisoner can expect to be released on licence before the expiry of the tariff, which is the period deemed necessary to be spent in custody to meet the requirements of retribution and deterrence.

Of the 265 life sentence prisoners released between April 1996 and October 1998, three were released on tariff expiry, 90 within one year of tariff expiry and 172 more than one year after tariff expiry. The information required to calculate the median period for the latter could be obtained only by examining individual prisoners' records.

In his announcement of 9 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *587–88*, my right hon. Friend set out revised arrangements for the review of life sentence cases which will enable more prisoners to be released at or close to tariff expiry where it is safe to do so.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted murderers have, in the past 12 months, been set tariffs of *(a)* four, *(b)* five, *(c)* six, *(d)* seven, *(e)* eight, *(f)* nine, *(g)* 10, *(h)* 11, *(i)* 12, *(j)* 13, *(k)* 14, *(l)* 15, *(m)* 16, *(n)* 17, *(o)* 18, *(p)* 19, *(q)* 20 and *(r)* over 20 years. [59415]

Mr. George Howarth: The number of convicted murderers for whom a tariff was set for the first time in the period 1 November 1997 to 31 October 1998 (inclusive) was 315. The tariffs are broken down by length in the table.

Tariff length in years	*Number of murderers*
4	0
5	0
6	0
7	2
8	11
9	9
10	36
11	16
12	54
13	29
14	42
15	41
16	21
17	8
18	14
19	2
20	22
over 20	8
Total	315

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department against how many persons action was commenced as alleged illegal immigrants in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 1998; and how many persons were *(a)* detained as a result of such action and *(b)* removed as illegal immigrants, broken down by country of origin. [59201]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The numbers of persons against whom enforcement action was initiated under sections 3(5), 3(6) or 33(1) of the Immigration Act 1971 is given in tables 5.1 (Total enforcement action), 5.2 (Illegal entrants) and 5.3 (Deportation action) of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom, First Half 1998", issue 24/98. Copies of this publication are available in the Library.

Information on the numbers of enforcement removals, including those who left voluntarily after enforcement action had been initiated by nationality, are given in the table.

Regrettably, reliable information on the total number of persons detained each year following enforcement action could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Persons removed[1] as a result of enforcement action, 1996 to first half 1998[2,3]

Number of persons

	1996	*1997*	*1998*
Persons removed as a result of deportation action[4]			
Europe	360	420	190
Americas	270	360	180
Africa	750	700	300
Indian sub-continent	400	360	160
Other Asia	200	200	70
Oceania	30	30	10
Other nationalities	10	10	—
All nationalities	2,000	2,070	920
Persons removed as a result of illegal entry action[5]			
Europe	1,060	1,350	780
Americas	280	240	140
Africa	720	1,040	450
Indian sub-continent	1,090	1,520	830
Other Asia	230	300	150
Oceania	10	20	10
Other nationalities	20	40	20
All nationalities	3,400	4,500	2,380

[1] Including persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them

[2] Data are rounded

[3] 1998 data are provisional and cover the first half year, 1 January to 30 June

[4] Deportation action under section 3(5) or 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1971

[5] Illegal entry action under section 33(1) of the Immigration Act 1971

Sussex Police

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* civilians and *(b)* police officers of what rank, are employed in the civil and administration support units of the Sussex police. [59461]

Mr. Boateng: I understand from the Chief Constable of Sussex that there are 185 civilian staff employed in Administration Support Units, known by the Sussex Police as Criminal Justice Support Units (CJSUs). Seven police officers of inspector rank oversee Sussex's multi-skilled units, of which the CJSUs form a part. The inspectors also have other responsibilities.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals to immigration adjudicators were *(a)* allowed, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* withdrawn in the first and second quarters of 1998, broken down by category of appeal and nationality; and what were the figures for 1997. [58745]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information regarding the outcome of appeals to the immigration adjudicators, by category and nationality for 1997, is given in table 8.1 of the Home Office report "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1997" (CM4033), a copy of which is in the Library.

I regret that the same information for the first two quarters of 1998 is not yet available.

Firearms Compensation

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money has been claimed under the Firearms Compensation Scheme; and how much has been paid out to date. [59213]

Mr. Boateng: At 6 November 1998, payments totalling £61 million had been made to 49,300 claimants under the compensation schemes for large and small-calibre handguns. The value of the remaining claims cannot be determined until they have been examined in detail. I outlined the measures we are taking to speed the processing of these compensation claims in my reply to a written question from the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *179–80*.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. J. P. Cooch of Newton Preston will receive his final payment for the confiscation of his handgun in August 1997 following his letter of 1 November. [59266]

Mr. Boateng: The Option A and B elements of the claim were paid on 16 January 1998. The Option C element of the claim, which will require individual consideration of the evidence of value provided, will be dealt with as soon as possible. I outlined the measures that we are taking to speed the processing of these compensation claims in my reply to a question from the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *179–80*.

Radar Detection Devices

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to restrict *(a)* the sale and *(b)* the use of devices to detect the presence of police enforcement radar at the road-side. [58831]

Mr. Boateng: Tests by Government scientists on these devices show that they are largely unreliable and ineffective and that, where they do alert drivers, it is often too late because the vehicle has already been detected by the police detection equipment. However, officials from the relevant Government Departments are considering what action might be taken to make their use illegal since they are likely to incite drivers to speed in the belief that they will avoid detection and prosecution.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions apply to the *(a)* sale and *(b)* use of devices to detect the presence of police enforcement radar at the road-side. [58830]

Mr. Boateng: None apply. The police were, from time to time, bringing prosecutions for use under section 5(b) of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 until a recent Divisional Court judgment held that police speed detection equipment does not fall within the meaning of that section.

Racism (Police Forces)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take following the statement by the Chief Constable of Manchester relating to racism in his police force. [59072]

Mr. Boateng: Individual chief officers of police are responsible for ensuring that they deliver their services fairly to all sections of society. More generally, this is a matter which is currently being considered by the inquiry which my right hon. Friend set up into matters arising from the tragic death of Stephen Lawrence and it would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance of the report of that inquiry.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to London councils on dietary and housing provisions for asylum workers. [58953]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

We have not issued guidance of this kind to local authorities. It is for individual local authorities to assess the need for services in each case and to decide on the kind and level of services provided.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government are taking to ensure hostels for asylum seekers are adequately funded and regulated. [58954]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

Special grants will be made available to local authorities in 1998–99 to reimburse them towards their costs in accommodating asylum seekers. How and where local authorities provide accommodation for asylum seekers are matters for the individual authority concerned. However, local authorities would need to be satisfied that any accommodation provided was suitable, having regard to the needs of the asylum seekers concerned.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

European Business

Ms Perham: To ask the President of the Council when she will publish the Government's proposals for improving the arrangements for the Parliamentary scrutiny of European business; and if she will make a statement. [59592]

Mrs. Beckett: I have today published a White Paper entitled "The Scrutiny of European Business" (Cm 4095) and placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses. This document confirms the Government's commitment to effective scrutiny by Parliament of business across all three pillars of European Union activity, and sets out the key elements for an enhanced system. I have today also announced that a debate will be held on Tuesday 17 November to approve the procedural changes outlined in the White Paper, which the Government hope can be introduced from the beginning of the next Parliamentary Session.

Official Report

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee when he expects the CD-ROM version of the *Official Report* for the remainder of the 1997–98 session to be made available to hon. Members; and what steps he is taking to reduce the time between the end of a Session and the release of the corresponding CD-ROM. [59398]

Mr. Allan: The CD-ROM version of the *Official Report* for the period from Easter 1998 until the summer recess will become available next month. The disk containing the proceedings for the remainder of the Session is expected to be produced by March 1999. Discussions with the Stationery Office as producers of the disk are currently taking place about ways of ensuring more expeditious production of the necessary data and improved methods of data quality control, both of which may contribute to reduced delivery times.

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Prime Minister when he will reply to the letters of 26 October and 1 November from the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk concerning the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). [59493]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister replied on my behalf on 6 November 1998.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Film Industry

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what meetings have taken place of *(a)* the Action Committee and *(b)* the Film Finance Forum in respect of the film industry. [58485]

Janet Anderson: The Film Policy Action Committee has met three times since it was set up in April 1998 to oversee the implementation of the recommendations made in the document "A Bigger Picture". It is due to meet again on 25 November 1998.

We expect to make an announcement regarding the establishment of the Film Finance Forum shortly.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Early Years Development

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress being made by local authorities in preparing early years development plans. [58877]

Ms Hodge: All Local Education Authorities in England have Early Years Development Plans for 1998–99, demonstrating how the maintained, private and voluntary sectors will provide a free, high quality, early education place for all four year-olds in their area whose parents want one. Plans which extend to child care will be drawn up for 1999–2000.

Home Economics

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the use of specialist teachers of home economics to prepare young people as home leaders. [58961]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Home economics is not a discrete subject within the National Curriculum and is largely dealt with under the umbrella of National Curriculum design and technology. National Curriculum design and technology covers a great deal of ground, and the main need now is for generalist teachers who are able to teach across the breadth of the subject. However, many currently practising teachers have had a background in home economics training.

Likewise, home leadership is not a discrete subject within the National Curriculum, although there is a formal defined requirement for there to be a balanced and broadly based curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and which prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Secondary Schools (Parental Choice)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of parents in Doncaster Borough, when selecting a secondary school, obtain *(a)* their first preference, *(b)* their second preference and *(c)* neither. [59311]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This information is not collected centrally. Doncaster local education authority has informed my Department that 97 per cent. of parents gained a place for their child at their first preference secondary school for admission in September 1998.

Trainee Teachers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of *(a)* the Bursary Scheme for Student Teachers, *(b)* the Priority Subject Recruitment Scheme, *(c)* the Shortage Subject Support Scheme and *(d)* the Priority Subject Recruitment Scheme in Wales; and what research he has commissioned on financial support for trainee teachers. [59169]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* We keep incentive schemes under constant review. The Priority Subject Recruitment Scheme was established in 1996, building on lessons learnt from the Bursary Scheme for Student Teachers. Similarly, the new Secondary Subject Shortage Scheme, which is intended to enable trainee teachers who would otherwise not be able to do so to start or continue a course, is being monitored by the Teacher Training Agency, who administer the scheme. Evaluation plans are currently being developed for the substantial new financial incentives for maths and science students to be introduced next year, which were announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards on 27 October 1998. Regular surveys of students' income and expenditure are carried out by my Department. The Priority Subject Recruitment Initiative is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the areas of responsibility within his Department which have seen the largest real-terms increase in spending since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement on the outcomes. [59458]

Mr. Mudie: The areas which have seen the greatest increases in spending in real terms between 1996–97 and the plans for the current financial year are: schools capital (including the New Deal for Schools); specialist schools; local government education standard spending; and the new programmes on class size reduction; on literacy and the National Grid for Learning within the Standards Fund; and the New Deals within the Welfare to Work programme.

Disability Rights Commission

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will assess the proposals contained in the Equal Opportunities Commission report, Equality in the 21st Century, as a model for a proposed disability rights commission; and if he will make a statement. [59489]

Ms Hodge: The Government have completed their consultation exercise on the role and functions of the Disability Rights Commission and the responses are currently being considered. The proposals were based largely on the recommendations provided by the Disability Rights Task Force before Easter. The Government have recently received the Equal Opportunities Commission's wide-ranging proposals for changes to the law. These will be considered carefully and the Government will have regard to their relevance to the Disability Rights Commission. Legislation to create the Disability Rights Commission will be introduced as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to allow parents at feeder schools to grammar schools to take part in any ballots to decide the future of the grammar schools; how he defines a feeder school; what plans he has to extend the ballot to parents of children at other primary and secondary schools; and if he will make a statement. [59389]

Ms Estelle Morris: Our proposals setting out how parents might participate in any ballot about whether grammar schools should cease to have selective admission arrangements are set out in the draft Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations 1998. The regulations were laid before Parliament on 21 October and are due to be debated by both Houses within the next few days.

Independent Schools

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the system of inspection for independent schools; and if he will make a statement. [59359]

Ms Estelle Morris: I announced on 29 July new arrangements for regular educational inspection, with published reports and follow-up action, both for schools in the Independent Schools Council associations and for others with pupils assisted from public funds. Educational inspection of the remaining mainstream independent schools will be covered in our forthcoming review of the statutory registration and monitoring system. Inspection of children's welfare in independent boarding schools will be improved in the ways set out in the Government's Response to the Children's Safeguards Review (Cm 4105), a copy of which is in the Library.

Regional Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* by month and *(b)* by region, expenditure on the New Deal for young people during 1998 up to the most recent available date. [59166]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Expenditure that has been brought to account for the delivery of the new deal for young people, up to the 30 September in total is £47.14 million. This is broken down by the seven ES regions and Scotland and Wales as follows:

Region	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*Total*
Northern	226,277	337,921	512,866	716,469	1,108,541	1,252,371	4,154,445
Yorks and the Humber	400,448	757,637	1,384,827	1,820,674	1,691,456	1,691,456	7,393,126
East Midlands	309,145	315,978	471,865	539,282	961,751	1,044,162	3,642,183
London and the South East	964,092	1,033,055	1,745,945	1,179,937	2,742,943	3,137,462	10,803,434
South West	366,938	429,345	616,450	598,211	769,125	1,329,493	4,109,562
Wales	286,573	296,611	511,404	553,239	676,248	860,136	3,184,211
West Midlands	306,253	350,759	578,293	471,201	702,203	913,536	3,322,245
North West	553,491	590,675	919,505	1,102,491	1,521,832	1,660,899	6,348,893
Scotland	466,441	455,406	668,122	666,744	883,248	1,050,586	4,190,547
Total	3,879,658	4,567,387	7,362,534	7,212,401	11,186,565	12,940,101	47,148,646

This is in addition to the centrally managed funds for Capital and Marketing expenditure.

Children (Care Homes)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of looked-after children educated in care homes with education have been diagnosed with *(a)* psychiatric and *(b)* emotional and behaviour problems, (i) currently, and (ii) in the last three years. [59209]

Mr. Hutton: Information is collected centrally on the anonymised care histories of children who are looked after. Although this includes placement information, it does not record details of the child's medical or psychiatric history.

A national survey of the mental health of children is being conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and will collect data in the Spring of 1999. The ONS are also to undertake a feasibility study in 1999 to determine whether a similar survey can be conducted focusing on "looked after" children as a separate group.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Kingston Communications

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will grant an extension to the Kingston Communications PTO licence in accordance with the recommendation of the Director General of Telecommunications. [56034]

Mrs. Roche: The Secretary of State will consider a licence application from Kingston Communications in the usual manner and advice on the applications will be sought from the Director General of Telecommunications.

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements exist to involve his Department in the negotiations being undertaken by the Department of Health on the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme. [58325]

Mr. Battle: The Department of Health is conducting the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme negotiations on behalf of HMG. DTI and other Ministers were consulted in advance on the terms of the negotiation and will be similarly consulted prior to conclusion of the negotiations. In the interim DTI is kept informed of developments as member of an official level DH-chaired interdepartmental group.

Regional Assistance (West Midlands)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the amount per head of population of selective assistance, and EU economic regional assistance *(a)* in Stoke-on-Trent and *(b)* in the West Midlands in each of the last three years. [58834]

Mrs. Roche: The figures in the following tables show the amount of Regional Selective Assistance grant offered and accepted in the West Midlands Assisted Area (WMAA) and the amount per head. There are no separate RSA figures for Stoke-on-Trent which is not part of the WMAA and companies based there are not therefore eligible for RSA. The amount of European Structural Funds approved in programmes available in Stoke-on-Trent—Objective 2, Rechar, Objective 3 and Objective 4 has been collected within the most appropriate recording area—North Staffordshire—and compared to that in the West Midlands Region. No ESF figures were readily available for 1996 and 1997.

Regional selective assistance

Year	Grant offered (£)	Population (million)	Amount per head (£)
1996	23,904,900	5.3	4.51
1997	53,460,000	5.3	10.09
1998	34,340,000	5.3	6.48

European structural funds

Year	Grant approved (£) Nstaffs	WM	Population Nstaffs	WM	Amount per head (£) Nstaffs	WM
ERDF (£ million)						
1996[1]	17.956	165.544	254,000	5.3	70.69	31.23
1997[1]	1.199	12.094	254,000	5.3	4.72	2.28
1998[2]	1.573	61.289	254,000	5.3	6.19	11.56
ESF (£ million)						
1996	—	27.704	254,000	5.3	—	5.23
1997	—	10.203	254,000	5.3	—	1.93
1998	1.171	60.349	254,000	5.3	4.61	11.39

[1] ESF information is available only from centrally held databases in the ESF Unit. Information has been requested but provided only for Objective 2 and Rechar on a regional basis in time for the deadlines for this exercise. Figures do not therefore contain the amounts approved in Objective 3 at all. Objective 4 was not available in the UK unit 1998.

[2] ESF regionalisation has allowed the incorporation of ESF in all programmes including Objective 4 which has been available only from 1998.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total cost of the Minister for Trade's visit to Cuba on 2 and 3 November, including air fare, hotel and subsistence for him and his accompanying officials. [58559]

Mr. Wilson: *[holding answer 9 November, 1998]:* The total cost of my visit to Cuba and Colombia from 2–4 November including two accompanying officials was £9,985.85.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which members of the Cuban Government the Minister for Trade met during his visit on 2 and 3 November. [58560]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* During my visit to Cuba, I met the following 19 members of the Cuban Government (listed in chronological order):

Excmo Sr (His Excellency) Orlando Hernández Guillén, Viceministro, Ministerio de Comercio Exterior (MINCEX)

Excmo Sr Francisco Soberón Valdés, Ministro-Presidente, Banco Central de Cuba

Sr Sergion Plasencia, Vicepresidente, Banco Central de Cuba

Excmo Sr José Luis Rodríguez, Miembro de Consejo de Estado y Ministro, Ministerio de Economía y Planificación

Excmo Sr Manuel Millares Rodríguez, Ministro, Ministerio de Finanzas y Precios

Sr Rodrigo Malmierca, Viceministro, Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y la Colaboración Económica (MINVEC)

Excmo Sra Isabel Allende Karam, Viceministra, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (MINREX)

Excmo Dr. Carlos Gómez, Viceministro, Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnologia y Medio Ambiente (CITMA)

Excmo Sr Presidente de los Consejos de Estado y de Ministros Comandante en Jefe Doctor Fidel Castro Ruz

Excmo Sr Vicepresidente y Secretario del Consejo de Ministros y de su Comité Ejecutivo Doctor Carlos Lage Dávila

Excmo Sr Ibrahim Ferradaz, Ministro, MINVEC

Excmo Ing (Engineer) Marcos Portal, Miembro de Consejo de Estado y Ministro de Industria Básica (MINBAS)

Excmo Sr Francisco Rodriguez, Viceministro MINBAS

Excmo Sr Antonio de los Reyes Bermúdez, Viceministro MINBAS

Excmo Sr Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz, Ministro, Ministerio del Comercio Exterior (MINCEX)

Excmo Sra Estrella Madrigal, Viceministra, MINCEX

Excma Sra María de los Angeles Flórez, Viceministra, MINREX

Sr Carlos Martinez Salsamendi, Presidente, Camara de Comercio de la Republica de Cuba

Excmo Sr Arg (Architect) Osmany Cienfuegos Gorriarán, Vicepresidente del Consejo de Ministros y Ministro, Ministerio de Turismo (MINTUR).

Regional Grants

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account is taken of *(a)* transfer pricing policies between UK subsidiaries and overseas parent companies and *(b)* the accounting policies of companies when determining profitability for the purposes of regional grants. [58793]

Mrs. Roche: The impact of a company's transfer pricing policies and accounting policies on profitability forecasts are taken fully into account when appraising applications for Regional Selective Assistance, particularly in relation to assessing project viability and overall economic benefit to the UK.

Post Office

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, in determining the future status of the Post Office, he will ensure that the existing network of main post offices is maintained. [58799]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The terms of reference of the current review are predicated on a public sector Post Office maintaining a nationwide network of post offices, as well as continuing to provide a universal postal service with a uniform tariff structure. At the start of the review the Post Office were asked to suspend their Crown Post Office conversion programme, so that the matter could be considered in the context of the review. The issues are now being drawn together and we hope to announce our conclusions shortly.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the investment needs of the Post Office in each of the next five years. [59338]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Post Office's investment needs for the coming years are being considered in the context of the current Post Office Review.

Telecom Providers

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to require telecom providers to advertise their prices in a standard format. [59304]

Mrs. Roche: The regulation of telecoms operators in the UK is a matter for Oftel. Oftel is encouraging the fixed link operators in the UK to finance the development of a pricing comparison model to provide residential consumers with information so they can compare what their telecoms bill would be with different telecoms suppliers.

Twelve leading telecoms operators, including BT and the leading cable companies, are participating in the development process with Oftel. The intention is that when successfully developed the model will be used to publish price comparisons and that the first figures should be available next year.

The Government therefore have no plans to require Oftel to oblige operators to publish comparative pricing information as Oftel is already facilitating this with the industry's co-operation and agreement.

EU Consumer Affairs Council

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Consumer Affairs Council held on 3 November. [59968]

Dr. Howells: The Council discussed but did not reach a common position on a decision regarding the funding of Community activities in favour of consumers for 1999–2003 because of disagreement on the overall budget. The Austrian Presidency will try to reach agreement before the new year.

The Council agreed resolutions on the consumer dimensions of the information society and on the need for clear operating instructions to accompany technical consumer goods. An open debate was held on preparations Member States were making for the Euro.

There was also an exchange of views on the issues Member States would like to see in the Commission Action Plan for Consumer Policy Priorities 1999–2001. The Commission indicated they propose to issue a plan in late November.

The Commission gave brief presentations on their proposed directive on the Distance Selling of Financial Services and on their information campaign on consumer health and food safety. A list of the 'A' points approved at the Council has been placed in the Library of the House.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of the World Trade Organisation as the forum in which to conduct future negotiations on a multilateral agreement on investment; [59182]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on a multinational agreement on investment. [59257]

Mr. Wilson: It now looks most unlikely that negotiations on the multilateral agreement on investment (MAI) will resume. The Government remain committed to the development of international rules on investment. Our assessment is that the World Trade Organisation is an appropriate forum to develop such a framework, and this view is shared by our EU partners. However, any WTO negotiation must be on the basis of a fresh agenda that takes proper account of social, environmental and development issues.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Child Witnesses

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will issue a practice direction for trials involving child witnesses to simplify court dress and language. [58671]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are urgently considering responses to the report, "Speaking up for Justice", published on 10 June 1998, which made recommendations covering these points. The Government hope to make an announcement shortly on how they intend to take this work forward.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Waste Emissions

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish a breakdown of the content of unauthorised emissions from United Kingdom commercial aerobic/anaerobic digesters since January 1996. [56747]

Mr. Meale: Aerobic and anaerobic digestion is used throughout the United Kingdom in processes such as the treatment of sewage sludge and biodegradable, industrial, organic effluents (eg from food processing). These processes produce mainly carbon dioxide, methane and ammonia together with trace organic compounds. In the anaerobic digestion of sewage sludge, the methane is normally burnt to produce heat and power. The emissions into air from these processes are not the subject of specific controls. In consequence, it is not feasible to provide a breakdown of the content of unauthorised emissions.

The aerobic digestion (composting) of garden waste etc. is subject to waste management controls. The activity generally takes place in the open and potentially harmful emissions are controlled by operational procedures and conditions on siting.

Social Housing

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the capital investment in publicly owned and other social housing at 1994–95 prices in *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1984–85, *(c)* 1989–90 and *(d)* 1994–95; and what is the amount planned for 1999–2000. [58591]

Mr. Raynsford: Figures for gross housing capital expenditure by local authorities (excluding grants to the private sector and mortgage lending) and through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme are as follows. Future levels of housing capital expenditure by local authorities reflect the programmes decided by authorities in the light of allocations from central government and the amount of their own resources (e.g. useable capital receipts, contributions from revenue)

that they choose to use. The Government's spending plans for 1999–2000 include around £1.03 billion (£0.899 billion at 1994–95 prices) for local authority housing capital expenditure (other than allocations specifically for private sector grants); the corresponding figure for 1994–95 was £0.87 billion. The 1999–2000 figure includes some £570 million (£497 million at 1994–95 prices) released through the Capital Receipts Initiative, some of which authorities may choose to invest in private sector stock renovation or on housing-related regeneration.

Gross housing capital expenditure by local authorities (excluding grants to the private sector, and mortgage lending), and by the Housing Corporation in England

£ million

	Cash figures			*1994–95 price levels*		
Year	*Local authorities*	*Housing Corporation*	*Total*	*Local authorities*	*Housing Corporation*	*Total*
1979–80	2,186	400	2,586	5,372	983	6,355
1984–85	2,377	697	3,074	3,831	1,123	4,954
1989–90	4,515	935	5,450	5,562	1,152	6,714
1994–95	2,198	1,530	3,728	2,198	1,530	3,728
1999–2000	n/a	[1]795	n/a	n/a	694	n/a

[1] Includes around £150 million (£131 million at 1994–95 prices) for Estates Renewal Challenge Fund grant payments to registered social landlords which have been administered by the Housing Corporation since January 1998

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [58280]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* Compliance cost assessments published by my Department between 1 May 1997 and 31 May 1998 were listed in my answer to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *430–32*.

Between 1 June 1998 and 31 October 1998, 21 compliance cost assessments and regulatory impact assessments have been published by my Department. These are:

June 1998

The Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage) Regulations 1998

The Merchant Shipping (International Safety Management (ISM) Code) Regulations 1998

The Civil Aviation (Route Charges for Navigation Services) (Amendment) Regulations 1998

Amended Proposal for a Council Directive Establishing a Framework for Community Action in the Field of Water Policy

Commission Communication on a Common Policy on Manning of Regular Passenger and Ferry Services Operating in and between Member states; Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending Council Regulation (EEC) No.3577/92 of 7 December 1992 applying the Principle of Freedom to Provide Services to Maritime Transport within Member States (Maritime Cabotage); Proposal for a Council Directive on Manning Conditions for Regular Passenger and Ferry Services Operating between Member States.

July 1998

The Motor Vehicles (Tests)(Amendment) Regulations 1998; The Public Service Vehicles (Condition of Fitness, Equipment, Use and Certification)(Amendment) Regulations 1998; The Goods Vehicles (Plating and Testing)(Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Merchant Shipping (Small Workboats and Pilot Boats) Regulations 1998

August 1998

The Merchant Shipping (Registration of Ships) (Tonnage) (Amendment) Regulations 1998; The Merchant Shipping (Tonnage) (Fishing Vessels)(Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Merchant Shipping (Radio Installations)(Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Motor Vehicles (EC Type Approval) Regulations 1998

September 1998

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998

The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998

The Motor Cars (Driving Instruction)(Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessels (Health and Safety at Work)(Employment of Young Persons) Regulations 1998

October 1998

The Building Regulations (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations 1998

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998

The Merchant Shipping (Passenger Ship Construction: Ships of Classes I, II and II(A)) Regulations 1998

The Civil Aviation (Canadian Navigation Services) Regulations 1998

The Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998.

Road Works

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of dealing with the backlog of maintenance on *(a)* trunk roads and motorways and *(b)* local authority roads. [58702]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The Highways Agency estimates that some £300m per annum (1998–99 prices) is required for capital maintenance works to ensure that the condition of trunk roads does not worsen. This contrasts with the figures of £226m spent in 1996–97 and £219m in 1997–98 (Highways Agency Annual Reports). The allocation made in the Comprehensive Spending Review will be sufficient to enable us progressively to tackle the resulting backlog.

There is no central government estimate of a backlog of maintenance on local authority roads. The outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review was an increase

of £46m in each of the next three financial years in the Highways Maintenance Standards Spending Assessment which forms part of the calculation of Revenue Support Grant to local authorities. Local authority spending on non-principal road maintenance is funded entirely from this grant and local taxation. It is for the authorities to determine the level of expenditure necessary on these roads.

Maintenance of local authority principal roads is supported by resources from the local transport capital settlement. This funding is given following consideration of the bids made in each authority's Transport Policies and Programme submission. I am planning to announce the settlement for 1999–2000 in December.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he proposes to ensure that bus lanes are properly enforced. [59482]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Responsibility for proper enforcement of bus lanes is a matter for the Police. Local Transport Note 1/97, Keeping Buses Moving, provides clear advice on enforcement. Decriminalised parking enforcement in London has resulted in a better level of enforcement, and is an option open to other local authorities to pursue to support the police.

My Department's role is to investigate promising methods for improving the effectiveness of enforcement and disseminating the results to the police and local authorities. In this context, London-wide implementation of the use of video camera technology for enforcement of bus lanes is in progress following successful trials. The police and local authorities elsewhere may wish to consider the possibility of such an approach in their areas.

Environmentally Safe Technologies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce measures to encourage the development of environmentally safe technologies. [58602]

Mr. Meale: My Department encourages business to manage its environmental performance responsibly, using a systematic approach and reporting publicly on performance. The Research Councils support research into new technologies. The Energy Efficiency and Environmental Technology Best Practice Programmes also support collaborative R&D projects and demonstrate the benefits of applying new technologies, and they promote existing good practice technologies and techniques. Environmental regulations, including implementation of the EC Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive, will continue to require industry to use best available techniques, taking account of the costs and benefits. The DETR/DTI Joint Environmental Markets Unit sponsors the environmental technology industry and supports export initiatives. The effectiveness of these programmes and measures is monitored and kept under review.

HGV Drivers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to ensure the security and reliability of the smart card technology under consideration by EU transport ministers for the monitoring of HGV drivers' hours. [58712]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In agreeing the framework European Union (EU) Regulation to pave the way for the use of digital tachographs, the Government secured an amendment which requires the type-approval for the system to ensure that it is capable of resisting attempts to alter the drivers' hours data. Such tests must be carried out by experts familiar with up to date tampering techniques. The technical specification for the proposed system is now being worked up by a technical committee comprising all EU Member States. I can assure my hon. Friend that security remains our paramount concern and that we will continue to do all that we can to ensure that the proposed system is as secure as possible.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the areas of responsibility within the Department which have seen the largest real terms increase in spending since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement on the outcomes. [59456]

Mr. Meale: The Government took the decision on coming to office that they would retain the previous Administration's spending plans for 1997–98 and 1998–99. Only relatively minor adjustments to the Department's spending plans, therefore, will have occurred in respect of expenditure up to date.

The Government were able, however, to announce the results of their Comprehensive Spending Review in July this year and this made significant adjustments to the Department's spending plans for 1999–2000 onwards. Details are set out in the White Paper "Modernising Public Services for Britain: Investing in Reform (Cm 4011) presented to the House in July 1998.

The White Paper makes it clear that there will be a total real terms increase in the Department's spending of over 18 per cent. between 1998–99 and 2001–02. This represents an underlying real terms increase of 34 per cent. after taking account of the one-off consequences of existing rail franchise contracts, the new Public-Private Partnership for London Underground and the revised Channel Tunnel Rail Link concession. Within these totals there will be major increases for expenditure on improving energy efficiency (a real terms increase of nearly 90 per cent.), housing (nearly 50 per cent.) and regeneration (37 per cent.). There will be significant real terms increases to other programmes too.

The key expected outcomes from the Department's programmes are set out in the White Paper. Further information on targets will be included in the Public Service Agreements which the Government intend to publish shortly.

Air Quality and Transport Targets

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he intends to set local targets for *(a)* improving air quality, *(b)* improving road safety, *(c)* improving public transport and *(d)* road traffic reductions. [59497]

Ms Glenda Jackson: With regard to *(a)*, the Air Quality Regulations 1997 set air quality objectives for seven pollutants, to be achieved by 2005. Authorities are required to review and assess air quality to determine whether these objectives are likely to be met. Where it appears that these objectives are unlikely to be achieved, the authority must declare an air quality management area.

In general, it will be for local authorities to set targets on the basis of national targets (where these exist) and advice from the Department. Local transport plans will need to include an appropriate set of targets and indicators for measuring the extent to which plan objectives are being met. The Department is today issuing draft guidance for local authorities on local transport plans. This advises on the use of targets, including those relating to relevant statutory provisions.

Transport Decisions

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he proposes to make decision-making on transport more accountable to local people. [59499]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", has established the national policy framework to produce a transport system which is safe, efficient, clean and fair. Delivery of the policy depends, to a large extent, on action at a local level and local transport plans will be essential building blocks of the new deal for transport. The Government attach a high priority to effective public involvement, which will be a key feature of local transport plans. Our wider proposals for modernising local government will increase the accountability and responsiveness of authorities more generally. Transport users and local authority interests will also be involved in the Commission for Integrated Transport, which will be advising Ministers on decisions on transport at the national level.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has had from train operating companies concerning the renegotiation of their franchise. [59501]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Connex South Central has made formal representations for an extension of its franchise to the Franchising Director, which he refused on value for money grounds. Great North Eastern Railways has approached both the Franchising Director and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a franchise extension and this is still being evaluated. In several other cases, additional passenger benefits have been negotiated arising, for example, from breaches of existing contracts and from changes of control.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the Government's policy on the renegotiation of rail franchises; and if he will list the criteria by which franchise extensions will be granted or put out to open tender. [59500]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are prepared to renegotiate franchises where this would provide additional benefits for passengers and represent good value for the taxpayer. Criteria will be published in due course. Following the objectives, Instructions and Guidance which we issued in November last year, the Franchising Director has already been able to negotiate additional passenger benefits arising, for example, from breaches of existing contracts and from changes of control.

Sky Glow

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he proposes to deal with the problem of sky glow from street lighting. [59498]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are no statutory controls on street lighting and we have no plans to introduce any at this stage. Street lighting is the responsibility of the highway authority concerned.

Good design, installation and maintenance practices can do much to reduce the adverse environmental impacts of street lighting. My Department has issued advice on this subject in "Road Lighting and the Environment" and, with the Countryside Commission, has published a guide "Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice". Both of these refer to ways of reducing light pollution and sky glow. Much of the advice contained in the latter document is equally applicable in urban areas.

Buses

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many bus passenger miles were travelled in the United Kingdom each year since 1979. [59496]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The following table summarises the available published data, in passenger kilometres travelled on buses and coaches, for Great Britain:

	Billion passenger kilometres
1979	56
1980	52
1981	48
1982	48
1983	48
1984	48
1985	49
1986	47
1987	47
1988	46
1989	47
1990	46
1991	44
1992	43
1993	44
1994	44
1995	44
1996	44
1997	43

Trans European Network

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the United Kingdom's total commitment to the funding of the EU Trans European Network programme; and what is the TEN funding to which the United Kingdom will be entitled. [59495]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The United Kingdom's total contribution to EU finances is not hypothecated to individual programmes such as the transport Trans European Network (TEN) programme. In common with the other 14 Member States, the United Kingdom has no automatic entitlement to TEN funding. However, we have, as detailed in my reply of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *465–66*, been successful in securing awards of TEN funding since the commencement of the transport TEN programme in 1995, and expect that we shall continue to be successful in securing funds for United Kingdom projects and studies in the future.

Incineration (Safety)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what trials have been carried out to determine whether cement kilns can safely burn tyres. [59479]

Mr. Meale: The Environment Agency has regulated tyre-burning trials at the following cement works: Blue Circle Cauldon, Northfleet and Westbury. Currently, Cauldon is authorised to burn chipped tyres on a continuous basis and has done so for around four years. Northfleet successfully conducted trials in late 1996 but has yet to apply for permission to burn them on a continuous basis. At Westbury three trials have taken place. Despite the earlier Westbury trials being successful in reducing overall emissions to the environment, the third trial resulted in a breach of one of the authorisation conditions. As a consequence the Agency took enforcement action and the trial was, and continues to be, suspended.

Castle Cement's Ketton works was authorised to undertake trial burning of tyres in July 1998 and it is anticipated that trials will commence in January 1999.

Historically, Blue Circle's Hope and Weardale works and Rugby Cement's Rochester works have burned tyres. Hope works is applying to burn tyres on a trial basis but Weardale and Rochester works are not currently authorised to burn tyres on either a trial or continuous basis.

The results of all the trials can be found on the public registers which are maintained for each IPC process and which can be inspected at the Agency's regional offices and the relevant local authority offices.

Waste Management

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what statutory provisions govern the mixing or blending on site at cement works of *(a)* cemfuel and *(b)* other products derived from recovered solvents before being fed directly into the kiln. [59477]

Mr. Meale: As a waste recovery operation the blending or mixing of waste solvents to produce secondary liquid fuels, including 'cemfuel', for cement kilns falls subject to the provisions of the EC Framework Directive on waste (75/442 EEC as amended). The Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994 are the main means by which we have implemented that Directive.

The waste management licensing system provided for by the 1994 Regulations and Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 applies to both waste recovery and waste disposal operations. However, Regulation 16 of the 1994 Regulations excludes from licensing any recovery or disposal of waste where this is carried out under an integrated pollution control authorisation (that is an authorisation under Part I of the 1990 Act where the activity is or forms part of a process designated for central control under section 2(4) of that Act). This recognises that processes controlled under the integrated pollution control regime, such as cement kilns, should not be subject to superfluous control under the waste management licensing regime.

Under the Special Waste Regulations 1996, establishments or undertakings which carry out disposal or recovery of special waste are prohibited from mixing different categories of such waste or of mixing special waste with non-special waste unless it is permitted under a waste management licence; carried out under an authorisation under Part I of the 1990 Act; or a waste management licensing exemption applies.

Out-of-town Retail Stores

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to implement the proposal contained in the McKinsey report on granting planning permission to out of town large retail stores. [59460]

Mr. Caborn: The Government continue to be committed to the revitalisation of town centres and to the policies set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 6.

Ministerial Code

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of his Department's compliance with paragraphs 44 and 46 of the Ministerial Code in respect of the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). [59492]

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) has not contravened these or any other provisions of the Ministerial Code which governs the conduct of Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

London Transport

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what targets London Transport has been set for 1998–99. [59965]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Tables showing the targets London Transport has been set for 1998/99 are as follows. All targets relate to average performance throughout the year.

London Underground

	1997–98	*1998–99*
Excess journey time (mins)	n/a	[1]6.25
Escalators:		
% of scheduled service hours operated	93.0	91.4
Lifts:	96.0	[2]93.8
% of scheduled service hours operated		
Reliability of service:		
% kilometres operated	96.9	96.9

London Underground

	1997–98	1998–99
Train service regularity:		
% planned intervals achieved	95.9	n/a
Ticket Purchase:		
% of customers queueing less than 3 minutes	98.0	n/a
Customer satisfaction ratings:		
Train and station cleanliness	69	69
Security and safety	83	83
Staff helpfulness and availability	70	70
Train and station information	75	75
Train service	77	77
Financial targets	[5]—	£10.28
Operating costs per train km[3]	[5]—	£310.0m
LUL gross margin[4]		

[1] This is a new target replacing previous targets on train service headways and ticket office queues. See note below for details.
[2] See below for explanation of lower targets in 1998–99 than in 1997–98.
[3] Costs per operated train kilometre to exclude depreciation, renewals, restructuring and PFI costs.
[4] LUL gross margin before depreciation, renewals, restructuring and PFI costs.
[5] Financial targets were set in 1996 over a three year period i.e. to be achieved in 1998–99. The figures shown in the 1998–99 column reflect the original targets, revalued at 1998–99 prices.

L.T. Buses

	1997–98	1998–99
Reliability of service:	99	99
% kilometres operated		
Excess wait on high frequency routes (mins)	1.5	1.4
Departures on time:		
% on low frequency routes	74	77
Early departures:	4.0	3.4
% on low frequency routes		
Night bus:		
% departures on time	65	70
Customer satisfaction ratings[1]		
Condition of bus stops and shelters	57	76
Internal cleanliness of buses	63	83
External cleanliness of buses	55	78
Staff helpfulness	66	87
Bus station environment	71	76
Bus station information	68	68
Financial targets		
Subsidy per bus km[2]	[3]—	Not more than 6.53p
L.T. Buses gross loss[4]	[3]—	Not more than £21.7m

[1] These targets have been recalibrated for 1998–99 and so are not directly comparable to previous years.
[2] Net subsidy per operated bus kilometre before depreciation, renewals, restructuring and PFI costs.
[3] Financial targets were set in 1996 over a three year period i.e. to be achieved in 1998–99. The figures shown in the 1998–99 column reflect the original targets, revalued at 1998–99 prices.
[4] L.T. Buses gross loss before depreciation, renewals, restructuring and PFI costs.

Other Services

	1997–98	1998–99
Customer satisfaction ratings:		
Travel information call centre—ease of reaching Enquiry service	n/a	77
Travel information call centre—operator helpfulness	n/a	91
Dial-a-Ride—percentage of calls answered first time	n/a	20
Dial-a Ride—percentage of punctual arrivals	n/a	93
Financial targets		
Group services gross loss[1]	[2]—	Not more than £23.4m
Property rental income growth[3]	[2]—	IPD index
Dial-a-Ride cost per trip	[2]—	£10.80

[1] Includes Victoria Coach Station, Unit for Disabled Passengers, PASS and L.T. Museum but excludes Bus Insurance Liability costs. To be amended to reflect transfer of PASS to the private sector following the signing of Prestige.
[2] Financial target were set in 1996 over a three year period i.e. to be achieved in 1998–99. The figures shown in the 1998–99 column reflect the original targets, revalued at 1998–99 prices.
[3] To be at least as good as the average shown by the IPD index (Investment Property Databank Index) on a three year rolling basis.

Notes:

Lifts and escalators

1. This year's targets for lift and escalator availability on the Underground are lower than last year. That reflects the short term impact of the increased levels of investment in the Underground following the announcement of an extra £365m of funding for the Underground. We will be expecting improvements in future years as the benefits of the investment programme become apparent.

Journey time metric

2. This year's targets include a new target for excess journey time. This is based on a new measure LT have introduced—the journey time metric. The journey time metric is a system developed for measuring customers overall journey time on the network. It breaks down a journey into its component parts (ticket purchase time, access time to platforms, platform waiting time etc.) and measures them in a way which reflects customer's perceived time rather than actual time. This is done by the application of weightings. For example, people dislike waiting for trains, therefore a weight of 2 is applied to the actual wait time (doubling the figure for time spent waiting on platforms).

3. L.T. use this measure to build up a scheduled journey time, reflecting the amount of time a journey should take in free flow conditions, when there is no queueing, every train runs precisely to timetable, and there is no disruption. The excess journey time is then calculated by observing the difference between the scheduled journey time and the observed journey time. Both measures have the relevant weighting applied, and the difference between them will be the excess journey time.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what items will be on the agenda for his next meeting with the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs under the provisions of the Brussels Agreement on Gibraltar. [58817]

Ms Quin: We have not yet settled with the Spanish authorities the details of the next Brussels Process meeting.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has evaluated for the future sovereignty of Gibraltar. [58815]

Ms Quin: We have said we are studying the proposals Spain made at the Brussels Process meeting last December concerning the future status of Gibraltar and that we will reply in due course. We have also reaffirmed that we stand firmly by the commitment in the 1969 Constitution that there can be no change in sovereignty over Gibraltar without the consent of the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for improving the status of Gibraltar within the European Union. [58816]

Ms Quin: Gibraltar's status within the European Union is based on Article 227(4) of the Treaty of Rome which provides for the application of that treaty to

"the European territories for whose external relations a Member State is responsible".

However, in view of Gibraltar's particular geographical and economic circumstances, it was agreed at the time of the UK's accession in 1973 that Gibraltar would be excluded from three areas of Community policy. These are the Community Customs Territory, which takes Gibraltar out of the Common Commercial Policy as far as trade in goods is concerned, the obligation to impose a Value Added Tax, and the Common Agricultural and Fisheries policies. There are no plans to change this status.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament *(a)* with and *(b)* without a negotiating mandate at the Conference on Disarmament; and if he will make a statement. [59148]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We believe that the Conference on Disarmament should focus on negotiating Fissile Material Cut-off, which appears to be the maximum extent of consensus at present achievable, rather than attempting to negotiate a convention on nuclear disarmament at this time. We will nonetheless play a full part in consultations as one of the CD Presidential Troika to examine further approaches to other aspects of nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's position towards the UN resolution, Towards a Nuclear Weapons Free World: the need for a New Agenda, currently under consideration by the UN First Committee on Disarmament and International Security. [59147]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We oppose the current draft of this resolution, which we have considered carefully, since it is inconsistent with maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent. We remain ready to support measures that will make a practical contribution to advancing nuclear disarmament.

Ghazanfer Ali

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the detention without trial in Mirpur of Ghazanfer Ali. [59093]

Mr. Fatchett: I raised Mr. Ali's case with Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry of "Azad" Kashmir on 19 May and made clear our concern that he should receive a speedy and fair trial. On 31 October Mr. Ali was acquitted on one charge of murder and ordered by the Judge to pay Rupees 325,000 in respect of another. He has now been released.

George Atkinson

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he has taken consequent upon the decision adopted by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 17 September regarding the detention of George Atkinson in Dubai. [58874]

Mr. Fatchett: Our Consul General in Dubai delivered a Note Verbale to the Dubai Government on 10 November asking, in view of the decision of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, if it will release George Atkinson from detention.

Regional and Minority Languages

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which *(a)* regional languages and *(b)* minority languages in the United Kingdom will be selected in accordance with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [59288]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central, (Mr. Fatchett), on 4 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *350*. The Charter does not distinguish between regional languages and minority languages.

Compensation Claims

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the latest year for which figures are available. [59056]

Mr. Fatchett: We settled a total of five such claims made by our employees or former employees in 1997. The costs were £8,053.43 for three personal injury claims and £17,930.25 for two claims relating to employment protection.

There were no claims in respect of the public.

Bridges into the Future

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Bridges into the Future strategy. [58823]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have implemented the recommendations outlined in "Bridges into the Future" through a series of initiatives including a Recruitment Fair and an Open Day aimed specifically at members of minority ethnic communities, targeted recruitment campaigns, a series of Community Fora, the introduction of a mentoring scheme and training for staff on managing diversity.

A copy of two reports which outline the progress achieved so far in the implementation of "Bridges into the Future" have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Visas (India)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average time taken for the processing of *(a)* marriage visas and *(b)* settlement visas at (i) Bombay and (ii) Delhi. [58824]

Mr. Fatchett: The average waiting time for an interview (over the last 10 months) for consideration of *(a)* marriage and *(b)* settlement visa applications, in Bombay and new Delhi is as follows:

	Bombay	*New Delhi*
Marriage (applications from fiance(e)s) visas	10 weeks	24 weeks
Settlement visas:		
Dependent relatives over 65 and compassionate cases	Same day	Same day
Spouses and other categories	19 weeks	12 weeks

Successful applicants receive their visa once a medical examination, which normally takes between 7 and 10 working days to arrange, has been completed.

Visitors' Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he proposes to issue new guidance for visitors' visas. [59074]

Mr. Fatchett: Guidance to Entry Clearance Officers on assessing applications for visitors visas is contained in the entry clearance volume of Diplomatic Service Procedure. It is continuously reviewed and updated as necessary. We intend to publish a disclosable version of this guidance to ECOs as soon as is practicable.

Guidance to applicants is contained in an information leaflet. Revisions are undertaken when necessary. The most recent version was issued in August 1998.

Overseas Territories

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultation period will follow the publication of the White Paper on Overseas Territories. [59453]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: A date has not yet been set to enact the necessary legislation but the Government will ensure that there is adequate time for all interested parties to present their views before legislation is proposed.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to convene a conference of chief ministers and members of legislatures of overseas territories. [59437]

Mr. Fatchett: In order to create a stronger, more structured dialogue between Britain and the Overseas Territories we will convene an annual Overseas Territories Council, which will provide a forum for the Chief Ministers and Councillors to raise their concerns directly with Ministers. The first Council will be held before next year's Commonwealth Head of Government meeting.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *414*, relating to Executive Council meetings on St. Helena if he will give the names of those attending the meeting on 16 June; if they were voting or non-voting members; if proxy members were asked to attend; and how the quorum was obtained. [59452]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The following Members of Executive Council attended the meeting held on 16 June:

The Chief Secretary (Mr. Michael Clancy)

The Acting Financial Secretary (Mr. Desmond Wade)

The Attorney General (Mr. Kurt de Freitas, OBE)

The Hon. Eric W. George

The Hon. Terrance F. Richards.

All, except for the Attorney General, may vote in Executive Council. There is no provision in the Constitution for proxies. Section 8(2) of the St. Helena Constitution Order, 1989 provides that no business except that of adjournment shall be transacted by the Executive Council if objection is taken by any Member present that there are less than five members present (excluding any member presiding in the absence of the Governor). A quorum can thus effectively be considered as five.

Russia

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the UK has been asked to render to the Russian Government in tracing illegal currency transfers out of Russia. [59275]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* I have been asked to reply.

Earlier this year, the National Criminal Intelligence Service received a request from the Russian Interior Ministry for assistance in tracing assets suspected of being linked to organised crime. The request was made in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding concluded during a visit to London on 18 June 1998 by the Russian Interior Minister, Sergei Stepashin.

European Youth Parliament

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial support the European Youth Parliament has received from *(a)* United Kingdom public funds and *(b)* the EU; and if he will (i) list and (ii) place in the Library the documentation his Department has received from the parliament since 1 May 1997. [58[illegible]2]

Mr. Mudie: I have been asked to reply.

The European Youth Parliament receives no direct Government funding. Funding by the EU is a matter for the European Commission. The Department has no record of receiving any documentation from the European Youth Parliament since 1 May 1997.

WALES

Housing Renovation Grants

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total allocation of funding for housing renovation grants made available to each district council and unitary authority in Wales for each of the years 1990 to 1998; and what was the proportion of the allocation spent in each case. [58348]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Transfer of Functions Order

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the draft of the National Assembly for Wales Transfer of Functions Order. [59873]

Mr. Michael: I am pleased to announce that I have today placed in the Vote Office and the Library of the House the final draft of the Assembly Transfer of Functions Order. I am simultaneously issuing it for public consultation.

The Order transfers virtually all of my functions to the National Assembly for Wales. It lists all the Acts of Parliament under which I currently exercise functions, and transfers those functions to the Assembly. Accompanying the Order is a Technical Guide which details all of the several thousand functions which we will transfer in this way. Copies of the Technical Guide are also in the Vote Office and the Library.

My functions are numerous and wide-ranging, and this means that the Transfer Order and Technical Guide are weighty documents. This is a reflection of the fact that the Assembly will in turn have many important powers; moreover, specifying its functions in this way minimises the risk of future legal challenges as to its vires. I am, though, anxious that there should be widespread understanding about what the Assembly will be able to do. I am therefore also publishing today a short lay person's guide to the Assembly's powers, entitled "Making the Difference in Wales". Copies are, again, in the Vote Office and the Library.

I have been committed from the outset to full transparency and openness in setting up the Assembly. That is why I am issuing this draft and allowing a period of three months for public consultation and comment. During this period, I should be happy to consider any suggestions, whether of a general or detailed nature, which hon. Members might have: the text as it stands is without prejudice to any such suggestions. The Order is, of course, not capable of amendment once it is laid in draft before the House.

My intention is to lay the Order in its agreed form in the new year, and, if the House and the other place approves, to request that it be made before the Easter recess. That should allow the campaign for the first Assembly elections next year to be conducted on the basis of certainty about the extent of the Assembly's powers.

Revenue Support Grant

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make adjustments to the distribution of revenue support grant for 1998–99 to local authorities in Wales. [59874]

Mr. Michael: An unfortunate error in the data used to determine individual authorities' standard spending assessments has been discovered. The effect is that one authority's revenue support grant entitlement should have been about £171,000 lower than originally calculated, and the grant for the other 21 authorities should have been a total of about £171,000 more. Whilst this represents a very small proportion of the revenue settlement this year, I consider it right and fair to correct the position through an amending report under section 84A of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. I intend that the report should be debated by the House next year; at the same time as the local government finance report for 1999–2000.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the areas of responsibility within his Office which have seen the largest real terms increase in spending since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement on the outcomes. [59457]

Mr. Michael: In Wales, in line with our Manifesto commitment, we have ensured that health and education have received the largest real terms increases in spending since we took office.

For health, since July 1997, we have added more than £100 million in cash to the inherited plans and this has resulted in easing of pressures on the health and social care system last winter—and we have just announced more cash to provide similar support this coming winter; hospital activity has increased by 4 per cent.; training has continued for over 1,800 doctors and 2,000 nurses; additional staff have been made available for cancer services and there is a package of measures to tackle prescription fraud. It is also expected that in-patient and day-case waiting lists will be reduced to below the inherited level.

For education, we have increased the previous Administration's spending plans by about £80 million. This has enabled us to start reducing infant class sizes, to begin the long process of improving the capital stock so neglected over the past few years, and to provide local authorities with funding for schools. We have also been able to begin to redress the underfunding of the Further Education sector in Wales, so that it can play its vital role in our lifelong learning strategy.

Flooding

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who authorised the release of water from the Elan Dams into the River Elan on the night of *(a)* 22 October and *(b)* 28 October; what quantity of water was released, and over what period of time. [59396]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Only the normal compensation discharge rate of 68 megalitres per day, together with a maximum 32 megalitres per day discharge for power generation, was released from the Elan Dams into the River Elan at the times specified. These releases were authorised by the Birmingham Corporation Water Act 1892 as amended by subsequent abstraction licences. Significantly larger quantities of water were spilling over the dams. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with data on the combined quantities and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will publish hydrological hourly data from the Environment Agency on the *(a)* height and *(b)* velocity of flood water at points in the Brecon and Radnorshire constituency on the River Usk for the inclusive period 6pm on 22 October to 8am on 23 October; [59363]

(2) if he will publish hydrological data held by the Environment Agency giving the height and velocity of flood water at points in the Brecon and Radnorshire constituency on the River Wye from 6pm until 8am inclusive at hourly intervals on *(a)* 22 to 23 October and *(b)* 28 to 29 October. [59397]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Data are available from the Environment Agency on heights and flows in the Rivers Wye and Usk and their tributaries in the Brecon and Radnor constituency. I will send data covering the periods requested to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what quantity of water was released over what period of time from the Crai reservoir into a tributary of the River Usk on the night of Thursday 22 October; and who authorised the release. [59364]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Only the normal compensation discharge rate of just under 7 megalitres per day was released from the Crai Reservoir into the River Crai at the time specified. This is the statutory compensation flow rate authorised under the abstraction license. Significantly quantities of water were spilling over the reservoir dam. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with data on the combined quantities and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Home Energy Conservation Act

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to issue guidelines on the implications of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 in Scotland; and if he will place copies in the Library. [59321]

Mr. Macdonald: Detailed guidance for local authorities on the implications of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 was set out in the Scottish Office Development Department Circular 40/1996. It was issued on 27 November 1996 shortly before the Act came into effect in Scotland. Copies have been placed in the Library. Guidance on best practice is to be issued and copies will also be placed in the Library.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the areas of responsibility within his Office which have seen the largest real terms increase in spending since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement on the outcomes. [59455]

Mr. Dewar: Since 1 May 1997, I have concentrated on the Government's priority areas in Scotland of health, education and devolution. In addition, money has been found for debt redemption by Scottish Homes.

Scottish Beef

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what strategy he proposes to assist Scottish beef exporters re-gain market share once the ban on United Kingdom beef exports is lifted; and what discussions he has had with *(a)* the SNFU, *(b)* Scottish Enterprise and *(c)* the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food regarding such initiatives. [59328]

Mr. Macdonald: Recognising the importance of beef production to Scotland, we are working with the key sectors of the industry to help them prepare for re-entry to the export market as soon as exports can resume. This involves preparations for the operation of the Date-Based Export Scheme and investigation of potential markets for the export of beef and beef products. Scottish Office officials have been maintaining close contact with the organisations mentioned by the hon. Member and other bodies.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to provide financial assistance to Scottish beef exporters for the promotion of Scottish beef in Europe following the lifting of the ban on United Kingdom beef exports. [59327]

Mr. Macdonald: Our top priority is the lifting of the beef export ban. The key to regaining European markets will be the supply of a premium product supported by rigorous quality assurance schemes at every stage of the production and marketing chain. The Government are already assisting the industry to ensure this is in place. Through their Scotch Beef Marketing and Quality Assurance Initiative, more than £4 million has been made available to the industry towards the establishment of these Schemes and development of the brand "Specially Selected Scotch Beef".

The Government have also assisted the industry in commissioning a study to assess the opportunities for profitable sales of Scotch beef once the export ban is lifted.

River Habitats

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what proposals he has to increase the funding of habitat improvement works in Scottish river systems; what funds he currently makes available to fishery boards for such improvement works; and what the equivalent amounts have been for each of the last five years; [59329]

(2) if he will list his powers regarding habitat improvement works in Scottish river systems; and what proposals he has to alter these powers. [59330]

Mr. Macdonald: Responsibility for fisheries management in rivers rests with riparian owners and, where appropriate, District Salmon Fishery Boards. Scottish Natural Heritage also has certain responsibilities, particularly in the light of the Habitats Directive.

Payments for measures to improve riparian habitats are available to agricultural enterprises under the Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Premium Schemes which are administered by The Scottish Office.

Grants are also available from SNH for habitat improvement works in Scottish rivers. District Salmon Fishery Boards may participate in such works. Information on the sums Boards may have received is not available centrally.

My right hon. Friend has no current proposal to alter his powers.

Salmon

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to reduce angling in Scottish salmon rivers; and what estimates he has made of catch levels in Scottish rivers in each of the past five years; [59324]

(2) what representations he has received on proposals to reduce commercial salmon netting in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [59325]

Mr. Macdonald: Reported catches of salmon during 1997 were the lowest on record. This situation was broadly reflected throughout the range of the species. This prompted the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea to advise the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation that extreme caution should be exercised in the exploitation of stocks, both by angling and nets, particularly early running fish.

On 9 October, my noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for fisheries at the Scottish Office, Lord Sewel, met representatives of District Salmon Fishery Boards, who are charged with statutory responsibility for managing wild stocks, and urged on them the need to take appropriate action in the light of the advice received. Information on catches in Scottish rivers has been collected since 1952 and published in the statistical bulletins, copies of which have been placed in the House Library.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has assessed of the effects of seal predation of Scottish salmon stocks; and what measures he proposes to take. [59326]

Mr. Macdonald: A recent study based on direct observation of seals and their impact on salmon in the rivers Dee and Don was conducted by Aberdeen University and the Marine Laboratory in Aberdeen. A new project studying the interaction between the species is about to start on the River Conon. These studies, together with the 1998 report from the Special Committee on Seals of the Natural Environment Research Council, which is expected shortly, will inform future decisions about seal management.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parades Commission

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has in respect of appointments to the Parades Commission. [59872]

Marjorie Mowlam: I am pleased to announce that Alistair Graham has accepted my invitation to extend his term as chairman of the Parades Commission for Northern Ireland for a further period of 1 year, until 18 February 2000; and that Frank Guckian and David Hewitt have agreed to continue as members until the same date.

Schools (Enrolment)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the enrolment *(a)* is this year and *(b)* was five years ago for each primary, secondary and grammar school in the Strangford constituency on the basis of the most recent constituency boundaries. [59355]

Mr. McFall: The enrolment figures for 1998/99 are not yet available.

The information for 1997–98 and 1992–93 is as follows:

Strangford

	1992–93	*1997–98*
a. Primary schools[1]		
Abbey PS	485	598
Alexander Dickson PS	202	217
Andrews Memorial PS	496	517
Ballycloughan PS	70	79
Ballykeigle PS	56	57
Ballywalter PS	135	165
Carrickmannon PS	78	80
Carrowdore PS	136	130
Carryduff PS	280	286
Castle Gardens PS	454	416
Comber PS	404	375
Darragh Cross PS	66	84
Derryboy PS	79	77
Greyabbey PS	65	73
Killinchy PS	235	217
Killyleagh PS	157	137
Kircubbin PS	59	79
Kirkistown PS	49	59
Londonderry PS	277	317
Loughries PS	85	83
Moneyrea PS	134	141
Newtownards Model PS	362	404
O'Neill Memorial PS	40	36
Portaferry Integrated PS	42	60
Portavogie PS	161	136
Regent House Preparatory Department	177	159
St. Finian's PS	208	144
St. Joseph's PS	443	675
St. Mary's PS (Portaferry)	325	270
St. Mary's PS (Killyleagh)	169	133
St. Mary's PS (Comber)	35	27
St. Mary's PS (Ballygowan)	66	48
St. Mary's PS (Kircubbin)	224	222
St. Patrick's PS	85	110
Victoria PS (Newtownards)	567	568
Victoria PS (Ballyhalbert)	105	101
West Winds PS	218	196
b. Secondary Schools		
Comber High School	487	452
Dundonald High School	609	645
Glastry High School	528	582

Strangford

	1992–93	*1997–98*
Lagan College	811	964
Movilla High School	688	888
Saintfield High School	273	339
St. Columba's High School	373	324
c. Grammar Schools[2]		
Regent House School	1,413	1,422

[1] Includes pupils in reception and nursery classes at primary schools. (Such pupils were incorrectly excluded in the previous answer of 2 November 1998.) Also includes pupils in preparatory departments of grammar schools.
[2] Figures exclude preparatory department pupils.

DEFENCE

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 October 1998, *Official Report,* column 112, if he will list the areas of common interest the United Kingdom has with the United States of America in connection with ballistic missile defence research; and if he will give the establishments at which the research is undertaken. [58206]

Mr. George Robertson: The areas of common interest the UK has with the USA in connection with ballistic missile research are many, the most significant being, performance of radars and other sensors, the guidance of interceptors, understanding the characteristics of ballistic missiles, the effective interception of ballistic missile warheads, and operating in coalition with Allies in air defence. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency leads the programmes, working in close partnership with UK industry.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has carried out during his review of ballistic missile attack risks to the United Kingdom; and when he plans to produce his report. [57916]

Mr. George Robertson: Britain's approach to Ballistic Missile Defence was considered as part of the Strategic Defence Review. Supporting Essay 5, published as part of our report on the Strategic Defence Review, set out our conclusion that the risk to Britain from the ballistic missiles of nations of concern was many years off. This conclusion was based on a careful review and assessment of the intelligence information available to the Ministry of Defence from a variety of sources. As indicated in the Essay, we are continuing to monitor the position, and remain in close touch with our Allies.

Separately, we have undertaken a detailed review of other capabilities required to maintain a coherent national defence response to the risks posed by nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, also referred to in the discussion of defence responses to proliferation in Supporting Essay 5. The conclusions of this review will be given to the House shortly.

Al-Yamamah Arms Deal

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Armscor or Allivane International Ltd. were involved in the Al-Yamamah arms deal. [59048]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* The MOD is unaware of any involvement in the Al-Yamamah programme, either now or in the past, by the two companies named.

Information Warfare Incidents

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) about the penetration of key protection points and registration of such information warfare incidents on the Government-wide unified incident reporting and alert scheme. [59430]

Mr. Spellar: A copy of my letter is being placed in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Visit (Turkey)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last made an official visit to Turkey; and if he will list those people with whom he held discussions on his visit. [58593]

Mr. George Robertson: I visited Turkey between 14 and 16 September 1998 at the invitation of the Turkish Defence Minister, with whom I held discussions. I also made office calls on the Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Trials (Defendants' Health)

31. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Attorney-General in how many cases since 1990 he and his predecessors have decided not to proceed with *(a)* a prosecution and *(b)* a retrial because of the alleged adverse impact of a trial on the health of the defendant. [58036]

The Attorney-General: Significant ill-health on the part of an alleged offender may be a relevant factor to be considered by a prosecuting authority in deciding whether to institute or continue criminal proceedings in a particular case. Statistics are not maintained as to the number of occasions ill-health has been a factor in cases considered by the Law Officers.

Extradition

34. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Attorney-General how many staff in the Crown Prosecution Service deal with extradition cases. [58039]

The Solicitor-General: There are currently 9 lawyers and 16 caseworkers in the branch of Central Casework whose work includes handling requests from overseas jurisdictions for the extradition of alleged offenders from the UK. They also provide the necessary specialist input for extradition requests generated by CPS branches throughout England and Wales.

Criminal Law

35. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received on improving the enforcement of the criminal law. [58040]

The Solicitor-General: My department frequently receives suggestions on improving the enforcement of the criminal law. The Government recognise the importance of this and have embarked upon a comprehensive programme, which is the joint responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and myself, for modernising the criminal justice system and ensuring that it is planned and managed in a more coherent and coordinated way. The Government's aim is to ensure that the system dispenses criminal justice fairly, effectively, speedily and efficiently, increasing people's confidence in the courts and the prosecution process, and contributing to our objective of reducing crime and fear of crime.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what proposals he has for reviewing the enforcement of *(a)* the criminal law and *(b)* international law in the United Kingdom. [58037]

The Attorney-General: Responsibility for the enforcement of the criminal law is shared between a number of agencies in the criminal justice system. I have a responsibility for the prosecution process and in particular the work of the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office. Those two prosecuting agencies apply the twin tests set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors to decide whether or not individual cases should be prosecuted. Adequate measures are in place to ensure that the United Kingdom's international obligations are given full effect in domestic law, when that is necessary.

Former Secretary of State for Wales

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the approach made by Mr. Alan Steele of the Treasury Solicitor's Department to *The Sun* newspaper about the resignation of the former Secretary of State for Wales. [59971]

The Attorney-General: There is no person called Alan Steele working in the Treasury Solicitor's Department (or indeed known to the TSD) and no member of that Department made any telephone call to *The Sun* relating to the resignation of the former Secretary of State for Wales.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress of his plans to reorganise the Crown Prosecution Service. [58033]

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *540*, to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones).

SOCIAL SECURITY

Personal Injury

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the last year for which figures are available. [59057]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Total cost to public funds of compensation paid by this Department, excluding the Child Support Agency, in the Financial Year 1997–98 in respect of personal injury, and employment protection

	£
Personal injury	606,817.74
Compensation awarded to employees or ex-employees of the Department by either the Civil Service Appeal Board or by Employment Tribunal	265,718.59

Note:
The Child Support Agency do not keep statistics on these figures separately, but the total cost to that Agency, in respect of personal injury and compensation awarded for the year 1997–98, was £35,400.

Agents

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to allow people who are physically incapacitated to appoint agents to sign pension slips on their behalf without a power of attorney; what assessment he has made of the security of the present arrangements for marking such slips; and if he will make a statement. [59395]

Mr. Denham: A person who is physically disabled has the right to authorise an agent to collect their benefit or pension from the post office. A power of attorney is not needed. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Where the agent arrangement is temporary the benefit claimant signs a declaration on the back of the order-book slip authorising payment to the agent. For permanent arrangements the claimant must ask the Benefits Agency to issue an agency card which authorises the agent to collect payment.

A claimant has the right to revoke or change an agent nomination at any time. If the claimant becomes no longer mentally capable of dealing with their own affairs, the Secretary of State has the power to appoint a suitable person, normally the spouse or a close friend or relative of the claimant to act on their behalf in all matters to do with the benefit claim including receipt of the benefit payment. The Secretary of State can revoke such an arrangement if the arrangement is not working satisfactorily.

We are currently reviewing the procedures, guidance and information materials relating to appointeeships.

Welfare Reform

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *173*, on losses resulting from welfare reform, if he will indicate where, in the three documents cited, the definition of loss which underlies his principle that no current recipient shall face a loss as a result of welfare reform occurs. [59432]

Mr. Denham: The information can be found in Chapter One, paragraph 6 and Chapter Two, paragraphs 29 and 35 of the document "A new contract for welfare: Support for Disabled People" (Cm 4103).

All-work Tests

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many all work tests expressed as year on year figures from 1995 to 1998 have been *(a)* taken and *(b)* failed, expressed as a percentage of the total in (i) each London borough, (ii) each London parliamentary constituency and (iii) nationally. [59357]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

All work tests carried out in Great Britain

	Total all work tests carried out[1]	*Disallowances following all work test*	*Percentage disallowed*
13 April 1995–31 March 1996	664,589	103,087	15
1 April 1996–31 March 1997	1,046,427	205,748	20
1 April 1997–31 March 1998	991,298	217,557	22

[1] Includes cases where the All Work Test is satisfied without the need for a medical examination by a Medical Services doctor

Source:

100 per cent. count of the benefit computer system. Excludes a small number of cases not on the system

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department has for the reform of industrial injuries disablement benefit; and if he will make a statement. [59488]

Mr. Timms: The Welfare Reform Programme is looking widely at all current benefit provision. In the case of Industrial Injuries no decisions have yet been taken. We will make an announcement in due course.

Pensioners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *25–26*, concerning pensioner incomes, if he will *(a)* provide corresponding figures on pensioner incomes based on his Department's Family Resources Survey for each year for which that survey has been undertaken, *(b)* make a statement on the differences between the results of the FRS analysis and those provided in his answer of 26 October, *(c)* estimate the number of pensioners in each age, sex and marital status category in each year for which the pensioner income series has been conducted and *(d)* estimate the 95 per cent. confidence interval for each of his income estimates based on the FES and the FRS in each category in each year. [57223]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 29 October 1998]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables. The estimates are subject to a high degree of statistical variability. It is therefore recommended that, as for all estimates based on Pensioners' Income Series data sets, direct year on year comparisons be avoided.

Pensioner units' median gross income excluding means-tested benefits, by age

£ per week

	Age				
Year	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70–74*	*75–79*	*80 and over*
Single male pensioners					
1994–95	n/a	115	106	103	98
1995–96	n/a	116	100	99	92
Singe female pensioners					
1994–95	106	91	82	77	77
1995–96	103	93	88	78	79
Pensioner couples					
1994–95	n/a	221	189	177	166
1995–96	n/a	220	184	167	161

Notes:

1. All amounts are in £s per week at July 1995 prices. They are rounded to the nearest £1, although estimates are not necessarily accurate to this level.
2. Estimates are for pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined as a single (non-cohabiting) person over State Pension Age (65 years or above for men and 60 year or above for women), or a couple (married or cohabiting) where the man, defined as the head, is over State Pension Age. Estimates for pensioner couples are broken down by the age of the man.
3. Estimates marked 'n/a' are not applicable. Single men and couples are only defined as Pensioner Units if the man is aged 65 years or above.
4. Means-tested benefits are defined as Income Support, Family Credit, Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit.
5. Levels of means-tested benefit may be particularly affected by mis-reporting as receipt of State Retirement Pension and receipt of Income Support are often confused in both the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) and the Family Resources Survey (FRS).
6. FRS was undertaken 1993–94 but it was not used to create a Pensioners' Incomes Series dataset. Households Below Average Income and Pensioners' Incomes Series datasets were not created from the 1993–94 FRS as DSS analysts had reservations as to the quality of the income data.

Source:

The Pensioners' Incomes Series data set, based on the family Resources Survey

Differences occur between the results of the FRS analysis and those provided in my Answer on Monday 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *25–26* (based on FES) for a number of reasons. Results from the two surveys are based on the responses of two different groups of people sampled from the population. The FRS sample is selected from households in Great Britain, while the FES covers the United Kingdom. Patterns of response among those selected in each sample may differ. Further differences occur in the methods of data collection. A comparative analysis of general results based on the two surveys can be found in Appendix 9 of "Households Below Average Income" (HBAI) 1979–1995–96 and also in HBAI 1979–1996–7.

Numbers of pensioner units' by age and marital status—based on the family resources survey

	Age				
Year	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70–74*	*75–79*	*80 and over*
Single male pensioners					
1994–95	n/a	230,000	260,000	190,000	250,000
1995–96	n/a	240,000	230,000	180–000	270–000
Singe female pensioners					
1994–95	400,000	550,000	740,000	640,000	1,030,000
1995–96	370,000	510,000	750,000	680,000	1,020.000

Numbers of pensioner units' by age and marital status—based on the family resources survey

	Age				
Year	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70–74*	*75–79*	*80 and over*
Pensioner couples					
1994–95	n/a	970,000	870,000	450,000	360,000
1995–96	n/a	970,000	800,000	500,000	360,000

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 Pensioner Units.
2. Estimates are for pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined as a single (non-cohabiting) person over State Pension Age (65 years or above for men and 60 years or above for women), or a couple (married or cohabiting) where the man, defined as the head, is over State Pension Age. Estimates for pensioner couples are broken down by the age of the man.
3. Estimates marked 'n/a' are not applicable. Single men and couples are only defined as Pensioner Units if the man is aged 65 years or above.
4. Estimates are not controlled to independent population estimates by the age bands used.

Source:

The Pensioners' Income Series data set, based on the Family Resources Survey

Numbers of pensioner units' by age and marital status—based on the family resources survey

	Age				
Year	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70–74*	*75–79*	*80 and over*
Single male pensioners					
1979	n/a	220,000	220,000	180,000	170,000
1981	n/a	230,000	220,000	200,000	160,000
1987	n/a	240,000	220,000	240,000	180,000
1988	n/a	240,000	240,000	220,000	210,000
1989	n/a	300,000	200,000	200,000	220,000
1990–91	n/a	260,000	210,000	190,000	240,000
1992	n/a	240,000	220,000	200,000	250,000
1993	n/a	270,000	240,000	150,000	260,000
1994–5	n/a	220,000	280,000	160,000	250,000
1995–6	n/a	210,000	260,000	200,000	260,000
Singe female pensioners					
1979	500,000	710,000	810,000	720,000	750,000
1981	500,000	660,000	760,000	780,000	760,000
1987	500,000	650,000	680,000	760,000	980,000
1988	480,000	670,000	650,000	820,000	950,000
1989	460,000	650,000	680,000	800,000	960,000
1990–91	500,000	610,000	620,000	820,000	970,000
1992	430,000	620,000	700,000	830,000	950,000
1993	410,000	570,000	750,000	750,000	990,000
1994–5	460,000	560,000	720,000	610,000	1,110,000
1995–6	450,000	560,000	670,000	630,000	1,150,000
Pensioner couples					
1979	n/a	1,000,000	710,000	370,000	170,000
1981	n/a	1,010,000	730,000	430,000	180,000
1987	n/a	1,100,000	650,000	490,000	270,000
1988	n/a	1,090,000	640,000	550,000	240,000
1989	n/a	1,100,000	660,000	500,000	280,000
1990–91	n/a	1,020,000	750,000	540,000	310,000
1992	n/a	1,050,000	760,000	500,000	330,000
1993	n/a	980,000	850,000	500,000	330,000
1994–5	n/a	960,000	880,000	500,000	340,000
1995–6	n/a	1,050,000	760,000	530,000	350,000

Notes:

1. Estimates are for pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined as a single (non-cohabiting) person over State Pension Age (65 years or above for men and 60 years or above for women), or a couple (married or cohabiting) where the man, defined as the head, is over State Pension Age. Estimates for pensioner couples are broken down by the age of the man.
2. Estimates marked 'n/a' are not applicable. Single men and couples are only defined as Pensioner Units if the man is aged 65 years or above.
3. All estimates relate to calendar years, except the combined calendar years 1990–91 and the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96
4. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 Pensioner Units
5. Estimates are not controlled to independent population estimates by the age bands used.

Source:

The Pensioner's Incomes Series data set, based on the Family Expenditure Survey

95 per cent. confidence intervals for these estimates are not currently available. In some cases response variations may be a greater source of uncertainty than sampling error. It is not possible to produce confidence intervals for response variations.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* unemployed people, *(b)* carers, *(c)* sick or disabled people, *(d)* employees and *(e)* other adults, who are not members of either an occupational pension or a personal pension scheme. [57149]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 29 October 1998]:* Information drawn from the 1996–97 Family Resources Survey (FRS) is in the table.

Number of people who are not members of an occupational or personal pension

	Number
Unemployed	1,600,000
Carers	500,000
Sick and Disabled	1,500,000
Employees (inc self-employed)	7,200,000
Other Adults	2,200,000

Notes:

1. All employees earning above the Lower Earnings Limit who are not contracted out into an occupational pension scheme or an appropriate personal pension will be members of the state earnings related pension scheme. For example, 4.6 million of the employees group in the Table are estimated to be accruing SERPS rights at the time of the FRS interview. A large number of those in the other groups will have accrued SERPS rights from previous employment. Those with contracted-in occupational or personal pensions (and therefore not shown in the Table above) will also be accruing SERPS rights. In total, in 1995–96, it is estimated that 7.5 million individuals accrued rights to a SERPS pension (1 per cent. sample of NIRS records) at some point during the year.
2. International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions of employment (including self-employment), unemployment and sick and disabled have been used, and the analysis excludes those defined by the ILO as retired or students.
3. Membership is assumed to include those who have retained rights in schemes to which they are on longer actively contributing, and a small number who are drawing occupational or personal pensions.
4. The estimates are based on sample counts which have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors which control for region, council tax band, and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and variability in non-response.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will lose eligibility for the modernised incapacity benefit for each of the first five years after the reform is introduced. [58304]

Mr. Timms: Information is not available in the form requested. Benefit will still be payable in most cases affected by the proposal in the consultation document "A New Contract for Welfare: Support for Disabled People" to take some account of occupational and personal pensions above £50 a week. The estimated reduction in the number of people on Incapacity Benefit as a result of the proposed change to the National Insurance contribution conditions is 30,000 in year one, 50,000 in year two, 65,000 in year three and 170,000 in the long run. Changes to the rules on entitlement to Incapacity Benefit will apply to new claims only.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who are currently waiting to attend an incapacity benefit appeal tribunal in each administrative area have been waiting *(a)* one month, *(b)* two months and *(c)* six months or over. [58805]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

People waiting to attend an incapacity benefit appeal tribunal at 31 August 1998

	1 month	*1–3 months*	*3–6 months*	*Over 6 months*
Birmingham	300	850	528	866
Cardiff	526	1,424	1,265	2,273
Glasgow	359	1,722	2,120	6,134
Leeds	257	848	473	743
Liverpool	600	939	534	976
Newcastle	314	675	328	839
Nottingham	283	1,115	1,145	2,445
Salford	344	589	260	682
Sutton	265	923	634	1,401
All Centres	3,248	9,085	7,287	16,359

Source:

Appeals—Data supplied by Analytical Services Division (ASD) from the Independent Tribunal Service Generic Appeals Processing System

Lone Parents

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help is available with childcare costs for lone parents in the first month after returning to work. [58880]

Angela Eagle: Financial help with childcare charges is available to working lone parents through the in-work benefits: Family Credit; Disability Working Allowance; Housing Benefit; and Council Tax Benefit.

Lone parents can claim help towards up to £60 a week if they pay for childcare for one child, and up to £100 a week if they pay for two or more children. The care must be of a recognised standard and in respect of children of the qualifying age (from birth up to the September following their 12th birthday).

The Working Families Tax Credit and the Disabled Persons Tax Credit will replace Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance in October 1999. These new schemes will include a childcare tax credit which builds on existing financial help. Lone parents will be able to claim help towards up to £100 a week if they pay for childcare for one child, and up to £150 a week if they pay for two or more children. The qualifying age for children will be increased to cover all children up to age 14. In the case of children who are disabled and who have greater needs, until the school leaving age of 16.

Vaccine Damage

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many representations he has received on the subject of children damaged by vaccines; [58752]

(2) if the proposals under consideration for changes to the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme include *(a)* paying compensation to those damaged by vaccines, *(b)* removing the six year deadline for applications and *(c)* introducing a sliding scale of compensation payments. [58753]

Mr. Timms: There have been numerous representations received about the Vaccine Damage Scheme. A presentation was made to the Disability Benefits Forum by the Vaccine Victims Support Group on 23 September 1998. I met with Members of the All Party Group on Vaccine Damage on 5 November 1998. Consideration is still being given to this complex and sensitive issue. There are a number of options currently being discussed and an announcement will be made in due course.

TREASURY

Self-assessment Returns

Dr. Vis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the accuracy rate of the self-assessment returns generated by computer programs; and what steps he has taken to identify design faults in specific programs. [58686]

Dawn Primarolo: Self Assessment paper returns are processed in the same way whether the form is computer generated or Revenue issued. The Inland Revenue does not record whether a rejected paper return was computer generated.

Around 10 per cent. of electronically lodged returns were initially rejected for the 1996–97 tax year. The reason for rejection would be notified to the taxpayer or their agent. Problems can arise because of the inaccurate entry of data, faults in the software, or problems with the Inland Revenue's own system. Where there is a recurrent problem it is investigated; if it relates to the software the provider is notified.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people complete their self-assessment returns using a computer program *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by the computer program used. [58685]

Dawn Primarolo: For the 1996–97 tax year the number of people completing their self-assessment tax returns using a computer programme was almost 505,000.

Just under 28,000 of these used the Inland Revenue's Electronic Version of the Return (EVR) with just over 477,000 using commercial packages.

The Inland Revenue does not hold figures for the different commercial products used to produce the returns.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the Inland Revenue's computer program for self-assessment returns for the next accounting year relative to those available from the private sector. [58687]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue's Electronic Version of the Return (EVR) is intended to assist a taxpayer whose main income stems from employment, pensions or investments to produce a tax return and tax calculation printout. EVR is distributed free of charge to any taxpayer and is not a competitor for commercial packages, many of which are intended to assist in the completion of tax returns; therefore no direct comparison has been made.

Inland Revenue (Preferential Debts)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the recovered revenue for the last three tax years arising from priority creditorship in respect of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax and *(c)* VAT. [59162]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The only debts for which the Inland Revenue is preferential creditor are those relating to income tax payable under Pay As You Earn and under the subcontractors deduction scheme. Amounts of preferential debt recovered by the Inland Revenue's local offices—mainly in relation to the smaller cases—are not separately identifiable, but for the larger cases dealt with centrally by the Inland Revenue's Enforcement Office, the amounts recovered in respect of preferential debts for the last three years are:

1995–96: £32 million

1996–97: £39 million

1997–98: £31 million.

Amounts of VAT which Customs and Excise have recovered as preferential creditor for the last three years are:

1995–96: £32 million

1996–97: £48.5 million

1997–98: £51 million.

Share Buybacks (Pensions)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total cost to pension funds of the recoup of tax credits by the Inland Revenue paid in relation to share buybacks between September 1994 and October 1996. [59272]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The Inland Revenue is making inquiries into a number of persons, including pension funds, to see whether they received an abnormal dividend in circumstances such that the tax credit paid is recoverable by the Revenue. There is no estimate of how much tax will be recovered from pension funds following these inquiries.

GDP Growth

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons he expects GDP growth in the UK to be lower in 1999 than in 1998; if he will quantify the causes of this growth slowdown by expenditure component of GDP; and if he will make a statement. [59422]

Ms Hewitt: Full details of the Treasury's new forecasts were set out in the Pre-Budget Report, published on 3 November.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates for the path of future United Kingdom short-term interest rates underlay the forecasts for future rates of United Kingdom GDP growth contained in the Pre-Budget report of November 1998 (Cm. 4076); and if he will make a statement. [59394]

Ms Hewitt: In line with the practice of previous Governments, the interest rate path underlying the economic forecasts contained in the Pre-Budget Report is not published.

Public Sector Investment

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total level of net public sector investment in real terms in 1997–98 prices for the years *(a)* 1992–93 to 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 to 2001–2002; and if he will make a statement. [59474]

Mr. Byers: Cash figures for public sector net investment can be found in Table PSAT4 in the First Release (Public sector accounts 2nd quarter 1998) published by the ONS on 24 September 1998. Figures for the GDP deflator are kept in the House of Commons Library.

The series for 1997–98 to 2001–02 can be derived from the cash figures given in Table B12 and the projections of the GDP deflator given in Table B5 of the November 1998 Pre-Budget Report. Net public investment will double, as a share of national income, over the next three years. This will help to provide infrastructure essential to a modern, dynamic economy.

Economic Forecasts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on which date he expects to publish the next Her Majesty's Treasury Survey of the private sector consensus of economic forecasts; and if he will make a statement. [59419]

Ms Hewitt: The next edition of "Forecasts for the UK Economy: A comparison of independent forecasts" will be published on 18 November.

Inflation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government's target rate of inflation will be defined in terms only of the RPIX measure for the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [59423]

Ms Hewitt: The Bank of England Act 1998 requires the Treasury to specify what price stability is to be taken to consist of at least once in every period of 12 months. In his last Budget the Chancellor confirmed the Government's inflation target is 2½ per cent. defined by the 12-month increase in the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments (RPIX).

VAT Receipts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his latest assessment of the future trends in the ratio of VAT receipts to consumer spending. [59438]

Mr. Byers: The projection used in the Pre-Budget Report for the ratio of VAT receipts to consumer expenditure is documented in paragraph B16.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on mortgage interest tax relief. [59444]

Dawn Primarolo: Mortgage interest relief for home purchase is given for interest paid on a loan used by the borrower to buy their only or main residence. Relief is currently given at the rate of 10 per cent. and is limited to the interest on a loan of £30,000.

Mortgage interest relief for certain home income plans is given for interest paid on a loan used by an elderly person to buy a life annuity. Relief is currently given at the basic rate of tax and is limited to the interest on a loan of £30,000.

Smuggling (Tobacco and Alcohol)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue lost through the smuggling of *(a)* tobacco and *(b)* alcohol into the UK in each of the last five years (i) in real terms and (ii) as a percentage change on the previous year; and if he will make a statement. [58760]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise current estimates for revenue lost (excise duty and VAT) through cross-Channel smuggling of alcohol and tobacco products in 1996 and 1997 are set out in the table:

Table 1—Revenue lost through cross-Channel smuggling

£ million

Product type	*1996*	*1997*
Alcohol	195	195
Tobacco	640	690
Total	835	885

Notes:
Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Components may not therefore sum to the total shown
Figures shown are in current prices

The percentage change in the estimate between 1996 and 1997 was 6 per cent., calculated from the unrounded estimates.

The above estimates exclude any amounts for revenue lost on alcoholic drinks and tobacco products smuggled in freight consignments or by air passengers. Customs and Excise have not published any estimates for the extent of these activities. Similarly, there were no official estimates for the extent of smuggling prior to 1996.

Prudential Insurance Company

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have held with the Prudential Insurance Company relating to the redistribution of surpluses on life funds; and if he will make a statement. [59454]

Ms Hewitt: The Prudential announced in 1996 that it was opening discussions with the DTI on the attribution of the inherited estate in its long term business fund. These discussions are continuing with the Treasury, which took over responsibility for insurance regulation from the DTI in January 1998. The total amount involved was estimated by an official of the Prudential, when the company gave evidence to the Treasury Select Committee on 2 July 1998, to be between £6 billion and £8 billion.

It is the Treasury's policy not to comment publicly on discussions which it may have with companies in its regulatory capacity, in the interests of effective regulation and commercial confidentiality. The previous Government's position on inherited estates was set out in a statement by the then Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs in February 1995, and reaffirmed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), the then Economic Secretary, in a reply to my hon. Friend, the Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg), on 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *750–52*. The Treasury will deal with the Prudential's proposals, and any other proposals for attribution of the inherited estates of life offices, in accordance with the principles set out in those statements. The Treasury will place particular emphasis on protecting the interests of policyholders.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *104*, on the operation of the working families tax credit, if it is envisaged that small firms will be able to claim a refund of working families tax credit before it is paid to their employees, where such firms expect that they will have insufficient tax and NIC payments against which to offset it. [59451]

Dawn Primarolo: Employers will be able to apply to the Inland Revenue for funding as soon as they can show that the amount of tax credit they are due to pay to their employees will exceed the income tax and NICs collected. Provided they apply in time there is no reason why they should not receive the necessary funding before they have to make the tax credit payment.

Pesticide Tax

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy regarding the imposition of a pesticide tax; and if he will make a statement. [59490]

Ms Hewitt: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Pre-Budget Report, work is currently being carried out into whether a tax or charge on pesticides would be an effective way to reduce pollution. There is evidence to suggest that pesticides have harmful effects on wildlife, terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and on human health. The Government will evaluate the findings of the research project, and the results of other ongoing work, in considering how best to proceed. No decision has yet been taken on whether to proceed with a tax or charge on pesticides.

HEALTH

Prescription Charges

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to extend the exemption from prescription charges to include people with long-term and chronic illnesses; [57861]

(2) what plans he has to change the eligibility criteria for exemption from prescription charges. [57860]

Mr. Milburn: The current prescription charge exemption arrangements were reviewed as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. Following the Review, all current prescription charge exemptions will be protected for the rest of the Parliament and existing patient charges will rise by no more than the rate of inflation over the next three years.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received about including cystic fibrosis in the list of treatments set out in the NHS (Remission of Charges) Regulations 1988; [57743]

(2) when he expects to make an announcement about changes to prescription charges for cystic fibrosis. [57744]

Mr. Milburn: We receive regular representations from cystic fibrosis sufferers.

The current prescription charge exemption arrangements were reviewed as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. Following the Review, all current prescription charge exemptions will be protected for the rest of the Parliament and existing patient charges will rise by no more than the rate of inflation over the next three years.

Specialist Posts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many associate specialist posts have been created in each hospital trust area in each of the last five years. [58283]

Mr. Milburn: Information about the number of associate specialist posts created each year is not collected centrally. Copies of tables showing the whole-time equivalent number of associate specialists in post in each hospital trust on 30 September 1997 and 1996 will be placed in the Library. Data prior to 1996 are not available.

Consultant Psychiatrists

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of consultant psychiatrist posts are vacant, where there are no plans to fill them, by health region. [58588]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not available.

Read Codes

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the independent evaluation of the Read Codes will be completed; [58577]

(2) what are the terms of reference for the independent evaluation of the Read Codes; and by whom they were determined; [58576]

(3) which company is carrying out the independent evaluation of the Read Codes; and on what basis they were appointed. [58575]

Mr. Milburn: The independent evaluation of the Read Codes is taking place in the following three stages.

(i) an assessment of the need for clinical terminology and the robustness of Clinical Terms Version 3 against alternatives;

(ii) development of a methodology for evaluating clinical codes in use;

(iii) a process of continuous evaluation in live use in clinical practice.

The detailed terms of reference for the first stage were prepared by the National Health Service Executive and will be placed in the Library. Terms of reference for the second and third stages have not yet been drawn up. The first stage is expected to be completed by the end of November, when the report will be made public. The first stage of the evaluation is being carried out by a consultant working within the Strategic Assignments Consultancy in the Central Communications and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA). The contract was awarded through the CCTA according to current Departmental guidelines and procedures. Contracts have not yet been awarded for the second and third stages; invitations to tender for this work will be widely advertised.

General Practitioners

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many newly qualified doctors will become available for GP service in each of the next five years; [58603]

(2) what percentage and how many GPs are due to retire within the next five years in each health authority area in England; and if he will make a statement. [58584]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not available centrally.

Doctors (Retirement)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors have retired from the NHS before retirement age in each of the last five years; and how many retired on health grounds. [59206]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not available centrally.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of people who have come out of private health schemes since tax relief on premiums for the over 60s was abolished, *(b)* the additional burdens which this has placed on the National Health Service and *(c)* future leaving rates from these schemes. [59079]

Mr. Milburn: None. The additional resources we have provided to the National Health Service far exceed any demand created by the abolition of tax relief on private medical insurance premiums.

Compensation Claims

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the latest year for which figures are available. [59055]

Mr. Hutton: In the twelve month period ending 31 October 1998, the total cost to Departmental funds of claims by employees and the public was £44,922.25 in respect of claims for personal injury and £18,800 in respect of compensation awarded to employees or ex-employees of the department as a result of proceedings in the Civil Service Appeal Board or the Employment Tribunal.

Medical Investigations (Area Health Authorities)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of area health authorities in investigating medical issues regarding treatment at private hospitals following the recent Tees Area HA case; and if he will make a statement. [58832]

Mr. Milburn: Health authorities are responsible for registering private hospitals under the Registered Homes Act 1984 and inspecting the premises, staffing levels and qualifications twice a year. They can investigate complaints that hospitals have failed to comply with that Act. A complaint about private medical treatment is primarily a matter for the patient and the practitioner concerned, and it is open to individuals to seek redress through the courts or to bring the matter to the attention of the General Medical Council.

Private Hospitals

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on his policy on the regulation of private hospitals; [58871]

(2) what plans he has to increase the regulation of private hospitals. [58870]

Mr. Milburn: We are currently looking at options for future regulation of the independent acute sector.

Medical Practitioners (Suspensions)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS senior medical practitioners are currently suspended from duty on full pay; what the cost of this is to the NHS; what action the Government are taking to reduce the cost of such suspensions; and if he will make a statement; [59754]

(2) for what reasons when a senior medical practitioner is suspended for reasons unconnected with his or her clinical practice, he or she cannot continue with their clinical practice; and if he will make a statement. [59755]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of hospital and community medical and hospital dental staff suspended is collected centrally only for those cases lasting more than six months. The last quarterly report, ending 30 September 1998, indicated that there are currently 14 cases of suspension which remain unresolved. Total costs incurred to date for these fourteen cases amount to £557,886.

The procedures take too long and cost too much. On 27 October 1998 I ordered a review of the suspension procedures with the aim of speeding them up.

Decisions on the need to suspend a medical or dental practitioner are a matter for the National Health Service employer to take. Suspension may be considered when a member of staff needs to be immediately removed from the employing body's premises to protect the interests of patients, other staff, or the practitioner, and/or to assist in the investigative process.

Breast Cancer (Clitheroe)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the factors underlying the level of breast cancer in the Clitheroe area of Lancashire. [59476]

Mr. Hutton: East Lancashire Health Authority has undertaken an analysis of the local breast cancer epidemiology. The population of Clitheroe is not large enough to enable meaningful statistics to be collected. However Clitheroe falls within the Ribble Valley and the incidence of breast cancer in that locality as a whole is 4 per cent. higher than the area average. This is comparable to that of areas with similar socio-economic population characteristics. There is no evidence that the pattern of breast cancer in Clitheroe differs from the rest of the Ribble Valley.

Cement Kilns

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received since May from health authorities concerning cement kilns. [59478]

Mr. Milburn: None. However, this is a matter which the Department's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants has examined in detail following reports by the Environment Select Committee. The Committee has issued the following statement this week:

"This statement updates a previous statement issued by the Committee in October 1997.

The Committee has subsequently examined data collected by the Environment Agency into Complaints and Odours in the Clitheroe area. It is satisfied that there does not appear to be a link between complaints or odour threshold exceedances and the burning of Secondary Liquid Fuel (SLF) during the monitoring period; and that the concentrations of substances detected in ambient air samples did not indicate any concerns for health.

The Committee is also aware that separate dust monitoring has been carried out at Clitheroe Hospital on behalf of the Environment Agency, Ribble Valley Borough Council, East Lancashire Health Authority and Communicare NHS Trust. Despite some concerns which the Committee has about the monitoring methodology—specifically, the unsatisfactory nature of the samplers used in the early phase of monitoring and improvements which might have been made to the study design—the Committee agrees that none of the evidence suggests that particles released locally are likely to pose a special risk to health.

The Committee notes that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has established an air quality monitoring site at Chatburn and that the first year's data show that air quality in the area is well on target to meet the objectives for Sulphur Dioxide and Nitrogen Dioxide set out in the National Air Quality Strategy to be achieved by 2005.

The Committee notes the action taken by the Environment Agency since 1 April this year to enforce a "Haze and Odour Condition" on emissions from Castle Cement such that

"no persistent haze or odour which causes offence (sourced from either chimney) is present at ground level outside the site boundary".

It notes its intention to continue to investigate all complaints and to take the appropriate action to enforce this.

The Committee notes that the fitting of a wet scrubber on one of the kilns at Castle Cement and the decommissioning of two other kilns at the site are expected to lead to overall improvements in local air quality over the coming years, particularly in the reduction of levels of Sulphur Dioxide and Particles.

The Committee also had access to more recent health data collected by the East Lancashire Health Authority. This examined hospital admission rates for asthma and for any respiratory illness, mortality data and prescribing data from general practice. These data do not provide any evidence to support the assertion that the health of residents in the Clitheroe area is being adversely affected as a result of exposure to emissions from local industry. Indeed, people living in Clitheroe tend to have lower than average values compared to people living elsewhere in the health authority.

In summary, the Committee reiterates the point that the data available to it do not indicate that air quality in the area is worse when SLF is burned when compared with coal; nor do the data point to the need for a survey of the health of the local population to be carried out."

Health Visitors

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the powers he has to prevent health authorities and local health trusts from reducing the number of health visitors they employ; and if he will make a statement. [59050]

Mr. Milburn: We have the power under section 17 of the National Health Service Act 1977 to direct health authorities as to the exercise of their functions. This power does not relate specifically to the numbers of health visitors, or any particular staff group.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have left NHS waiting lists following pre-admission in each of the last 12 months. [59475]

Mr. Milburn: The Information requested is not available centrally.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the areas of responsibility within his Department which have seen the largest real terms increase in spending; and if he will make a statement on the outcomes. [59459]

Mr. Milburn: Within our area of responsibility, real terms increases in National Health Service total net expenditure in 1999–2000 in England will be 5.2 per cent., a further 4.5 per cent. in the year after that and a further 3.9 per cent. in the last year of this Parliament. Within this total there are substantial increases in resources for the NHS and public health.

These resources will help us deliver our objective of a modern and dependable health service.

Asylum Seekers (London)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase payments to London boroughs to cover the increasing costs of coping with asylum seekers and refugees. [58968]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set out his plans to change the cumbersome immigration and asylum process we inherited from the previous Government in the White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum". We are considering how to improve the support grants for local authorities in the transitional period, and will announce the terms of the grants later this year.

Out-patient Costs

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual cost to the NHS of people failing to attend out-patient appointments. [58759]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the cost of non-attendance is not available. The average cost of a patient seen in a hospital outpatient clinic is £61.

Privately Funded Projects

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce regulations governing privately funded projects within the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [59358]

Mr. Milburn: A scheme taken forward under the private finance initiative (PFI) already has to be approved by the National Health Service Executive if it has a capital value of £1 million or more. Approval is not given unless a scheme demonstrates that it meets local healthcare needs, is affordable and represents good value for money. Once a contract has been signed for a PFI scheme, the NHS body taking the scheme forward is, of course, responsible for monitoring the performance of its private sector partner to ensure that it meets the standards specified in the contract.

Cardiac Arrests (West Midlands)

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage of patients for each hospital in the West Midlands Health Region in each of the previous five years who, having achieved return of spontaneous circulation following cardiac arrest at the point of admission to hospital, subsequently survived to be discharged. [58561]

Ms Jowell: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Royal College Membership

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* hospital consultants and *(b)* associate specialists employed in the NHS in each of the last five years has been a member or fellow of the relevant Royal College. [58739]

Mr. Milburn: This information requested is not held centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Transport

13. **Mr. Caplin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to improve the conditions in which live animals are transported. [58054]

Mr. Morley: We are working closely with enforcement agencies so as to achieve strict enforcement of the new rules we introduced last year. We have enhanced our procedures for ensuring that only fit and healthy animals are exported, and have consulted on important changes to the export certification arrangements. We have launched a new Strategy for the protection of livestock in markets.

Fishing Industry

14. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to define and promote sustainable fisheries, and to co-operate with its European counterparts to promote sustainable fishing methods across the European Union. [58055]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry's fisheries science programme aims to define sustainable levels and forms of fishing. The Ministry further promotes sustainable fishing by means of quotas, fishing effort restrictions and a range of conservation measures.

25. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last held discussions with representatives of the fishing industry on the regional management of fisheries. [58068]

Mr. Morley: Regional management is regularly discussed when I meet representatives of the fishing industry. The most recent occasion was on 5 November 1998.

Tuberculosis

16. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures have been taken to combat TB in cattle. [58057]

Mr. Rooker: On 17 August I announced a five point strategy to tackle the problem of TB in cattle. Since then we have made good progress in carrying it forward.

Cattle Tracing System

17. **Angela Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the cattle traceability scheme. [58058]

Mr. Rooker: The Cattle Tracing System, launched on 28 September 1998, has been generally welcomed. It will help the livestock industry and consumers by making it easier to check where cattle are, and trace them if there is a disease outbreak.

Beef Ban

18. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made on the lifting of the EU beef export ban. [58060]

Mr. Nick Brown: The European Commission's proposal for a Date-based Export Scheme (DBES) was supported by a simple majority of Member States when voted on by the EU Standing Veterinary Committee on 4 November 1998. It did not however achieve the qualified majority necessary for its adoption by the SVC. The proposal will therefore be sent to the Agriculture Council on 23 or 24 November.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to lift the ban on selling beef on the bone. [58787]

Mr. Rooker: The ban on sales of bone-in beef is not intended to be for all time. The Beef Bones Regulations 1997 remain under review, as is the case with all BSE related control measures. In expressing our hopes recently that the controls can be lifted as quickly as possible, we have emphasised that any decision to do so, or to alter their scope, would be taken only in the light of progress with the eradication of BSE, scientific advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee and the views of the Chief Medical Officer.

Common Agricultural Policy

19. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the common agricultural policy on hill farmers in the United Kingdom. [58061]

Mr. Morley: The Common Agricultural Policy has provided hill farmers with a great deal of financial support. However, the Government would like hill farmers to have a more secure and sustainable future than has been achievable under the present CAP framework. This is being considered in the context of the Agenda 2000 reform proposals.

Farmers (Early Retirement)

20. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has made to introduce an early retirement scheme for farmers; and if he will make a statement. [58062]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) on 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 599.

Agriculture (Lowlands)

21. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future prospects on agriculture in the English lowlands. [58064]

Mr. Nick Brown: While sterling remains at current levels, and with structural surpluses in most sectors, the prospects for increased commodity prices and improved incomes for all farming sectors in the year ahead are not good. That is why reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is so urgent.

Organic Farming

22. **Mr. Patrick Hall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department is taking to support organic farming. [58065]

Mr. Morley: Our aim is to encourage organic farming.

We are doing a great deal to achieve this. We have announced that, subject to clearance from the European Commission and parliamentary approval, substantial

improvements will be made to the Organic Aid Scheme which gives financial assistance to farmers converting to organic production. Payments are made over five years and are made independent of and additional to other subsidies which both organic and conventional farmers can claim. Payments to farmers in England under the Organic Aid Scheme are expected to increase to around £9 million by 2000.

We also fund the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS)—which provides a special telephone Helpline and free advisory visits for prospective organic farmers. Additional support is being given to this service. And we are funding a programme of Research and Development on projects designed to provide practical information for organic farmers and to assess the environmental impact of this form of farming. We have already increased the budget for this work to £1.5 million in the current year and we are planning a further increase to over £2 million next year.

Livestock Farmers (South-west)

23. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent measures he has taken to help livestock farmers in the south-west. [58066]

Mr. Rooker: Government action to assist livestock farmers in the south-west and elsewhere in the UK is constrained by the rules of the CAP. Nevertheless, we have successfully lobbied the Commission to grant Private Storage Aid in the UK in both the pigmeat and sheepmeat sectors. In addition, following representation from the UK and others, the Commission agreed on two occasions, most recently on 15 October, to increase payments of export refunds on pigmeat.

With regard to the beef sector, we have agreed with other Member States that advance payments under the 1998 Beef Special Premium and Suckler Cow Premium Schemes will be increased from 60 per cent. to 80 per cent. This means bringing forward some £100 million of payments to the industry which would otherwise not have been available until the spring of next year.

EU Food Surpluses

24. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the over-production of food within the EU; and what are the latest figures for the cost of dumping surpluses and destroying food. [58067]

Mr. Rooker: The Common Agricultural Policy has had the effect of encouraging agricultural production within the EU, with surplus production either being stored or sold on world markets. It is however difficult to estimate what proportion of current agricultural production is directly attributable to the CAP. As far as the destruction of surplus food is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the answer of 8 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *455*, which stated that the total sum spent on withdrawals of fruit and vegetables from the market in 1997 was 293 mecu (£213m at an average 1997 exchange rate of £1 = 1.3758 ecu). Statistics on the destination of produce withdrawn in 1997 are not available, but an average 62 per cent. of withdrawn fruit and vegetables was destroyed between the 1989–90 and 1993–94 marketing years. In addition, £1.5m was spent on the disposal of 6,000 tonnes of intervention beef in 1997. This beef was purchased and stored before the restrictions on beef from animals over 30 months old were introduced in March 1996.

Food Standards Agency

26. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to introduce legislation for a food standards agency. [58070]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Government remain committed to setting up a Food Standards Agency, but I cannot anticipate the Queen's Speech.

Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals

Mr. Geraint Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new appointments he has made to the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals. [59969]

Mr. Rooker: Ministers from MAFF, the Department of Health and the territorial departments recently approved the appointment of Professor Michael Langman as the new Chairman of the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals. We have also appointed Professor André McLean, Ms Clare Shaw and Dr. Lesley Rushton as additional members of the Group to serve alongside those appointed in May. Details of those appointments were given in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *456–57*.

Badgers

Liz Blackman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to carry out research into badger capture methods. [59970]

Mr. Rooker: The Bourne Group, which advises the Government on aspects of TB in cattle and badgers, recommended that the Ministry should investigate other humane capture methods for badgers, such as leg cuffs, as an adjunct to cage trapping. It also recommended that we should assess the actual welfare implications of snaring carried out in accordance with proper guidelines.

I have decided not to finance research into the use of snares. But I consider it would be prudent to examine whether leg cuffs might be a humane and efficient adjunct to cage traps. As a first step we plan to test a prototype leg cuff. If there is no evidence of harm to badgers a field trial will follow; otherwise the research will be brought to an end.

Farmers (Payment Delays)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the average delay between compensatory and subsidy payments to farmers being *(a)* awarded and *(b)* paid to farmers in each of the last 10 years; and what estimate he has made for the figure in 1998 to 1999. [57932]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* It is the Department's normal practice to notify the farmer in writing that a payment has been authorised and the average time between notification and despatch of the payment to the farmer in 1998–99 is expected to be 7 days. Corresponding figures for the schemes operated by the Department for the years 1988–89 to 1997–98 are not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Cattle Movement Service

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Cattle Movement Service. [58069]

Mr. Rooker: Further to my reply of 19 October 1998 to my hon. Friend, I can record that as of 10 November 1998, the British Cattle Movement Service has issued 293,391 passports and processed 126,083 notifications of cattle movements since its launch on 28 September.

Battery Hens

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he has taken to improve the welfare of battery hens. [58063]

Mr. Morley: Following pressure from the UK, European Commission proposals aimed at updating and improving current EU rules on the welfare of laying hens in battery cages were published in March. We initiated discussions during our presidency and will continue to work for an early phase out of the battery cage throughout Europe and improved standards in the interim.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55261]

Mr. Morley: The Department and its agencies occupies around 200 separate sites and this information is not readily available. The position at the Ministry's principal headquarters sites is as follows:

Ministry building	*Number of spaces*
Eastbury House, Albert Embankment, London	Fifteen spaces are available for either motorcycles or cars—all secure.
Nobel House and Ergon House, Smith Square, London	Public parking facilities are available nearby.
3–8 and 10 Whitehall Place and 55 Whitehall, London	Public parking facilities are available nearby.
Epsom Road, Guildford	Motorcyclists share the secure car parking facilities. There is sufficient space to meet any demand that might arise.
Hook Rise South, Tolworth	Six designated motorcycle parking spaces—all secure.
Kings Pool, York	Fourteen designated motorcycle parking spaces—all secure.

Some buildings, such as those in Whitehall, have nowhere where motorcycle parking could be made available. Other sites do have suitable areas and the Department will try to meet the needs of cyclists (whether pedal cyclists or motor cyclists) for parking and changing facilities, if possible.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to provide public information about genetically modified food. [58788]

Mr. Rooker: The Government are committed to providing consumers with the information that they need to be able to make informed choices about genetically modified (GM) foods. The UK played a major role in the production of the recent EC legislation that requires all foods containing GM soya or maize to be clearly labelled. In addition, MAFF has produced a Foodsense booklet on the impact of biotechnology on food production which has been widely distributed; this is currently being up-dated. Last year MAFF co-sponsored the Science Museum's Future Food mobile exhibition that provided information on the impact of biotechnology on food production. This is now touring the regions.

The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP), the UK's independent committee of experts who provide the statutory safety assessment of novel, including GM, foods under the EC Novel Foods Regulation, is also committed to a policy of transparency and openness. The Committee publishes the agenda, minutes and papers from its meetings and these, together with other information about GM foods, may also be found on the MAFF website on the Internet. Open meetings are held from time to time with observers from a range of invited interest groups and a brochure describing the work of the ACNFP, supplemented by a series of fact sheets, will be published shortly.

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the possible long-term harmful effects of genetic organisms on (i) human health, (ii) the environment and (iii) animal health. [59215]

Mr. Rooker: The safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are rigorously assessed in accordance with EC Deliberate Release Directive (90–220) and the EC Novel Foods Regulation (258–97).

MAFF has commissioned a range of research projects to underpin the safety assessments with over £1m committed to research on the safety of novel foods in 1998–99. Details are contained in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 11 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns 275–78. A programme of research to look at the possible risks to the agricultural environment from

the release of GMOs began in 1990 and over £3.5m has been committed to the programme to date. Details of completed and current projects are given in the table. In 1997, MAFF funded a project to look at whether animal feeds produced from GM materials are likely to contain intact transgenes. The results will be reported shortly.

Study	*Organisation*	*End date*
Prokaryotic gene transfer in the photosphere of sugar beet and wheat.	Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology, Oxford	30 September 1993
Virus interactions in transgenic raspberry and tobacco expressing the coat protein of arabis mosaic nepovirus.	Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology, Oxford	31 December 1993
Risk assessment of genetically engineered Lactobacillus plantarum.	University of Newcastle	31 December 1993
Assessment of pollen distribution from potential transgenically modified wind pollinated crops.	IGER	5 January 1994
Risk assessment survey on the release of genetically modified plants.	SCRI/Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	6 February 1994
Effect of releasing GEMs in soil—application of flow cytometry.	Institute of Freshwater Ecology	2 April 1994
GM Rhizobium strains as tools for assessing risk of deliberate release of micro-organisms into the environment.	IGER	31 October 1994
Transfer of recombinant genes from a GMO by bacteriophage from soil.	University of Wales	19 December 1994
Risks associated with the use of virus tolerant or resistant plants.	CSL, Harpenden/University of Leeds/PBI Cambridge	31 December 1994
Experimental monitoring of genetically manipulated bacteria using DNA probes.	IACR Rothamsted	22 May 1995
Gene transfer between Brassica and Plasmodiophora.	John Innes Centre	28 February 1996
Gene flow between geminiviruses and plants—an assessment of risk.	Queen Mary and Westfield College, London	30 September 1996
Factors that influence plasmid conjugation between bacteria in the phytosphere of crop plants.	Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology, Oxford	30 November 1996
Functional impact of genetically modified micro-organisms in soil.	University of Surrey	31 October 1997
Factors affecting heteroencapsidation by transgenically expressed virus coat proteins.	John Innes Centre	3 December 1997
Recombinant gene transfer in natural microbial populations of sugar beet rhizosphere.	University of Wales	31 December 1998
Assessment of the frequency of recombination in virus-infected plants.	IACR Broom's Barn	30 June 1999
The risks associated with the introduction of GM forage grasses and legumes.	IGER	30 June 1999
Consequence analysis of the impact on agriculture and the environment of the release of herbicide tolerant oilseed rape.	NIAB	31 May 2000
An experimental and mathematical study of the local and regional scale movement of an oilseed rape transgene.	SCRI	31 August 2000
Risk assessment of transgene movement.	John Innes Centre	31 August 2000

Rabies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when and where the last confirmed case of rabies was in the United Kingdom; what measures were taken to confine the outbreak and eliminate the wild species in the infected area and at what total cost; what measures he would take in the event of an outbreak; and how these measures would differ in rural and urban conditions. [59039]

Mr. Rooker: The last confirmed case of rabies outside quarantine was in 1970 in Newmarket. The case involved a dog imported from Pakistan on 30 May 1969 which was released from quarantine on 30 November. Signs of illness were first noted on 20 February 1970, and death from rabies occurred seven days later.

Another dog, owned by the same person and imported at the same time, which had shared quarantine accommodation with the infected dog was destroyed as a precaution against the spread of the disease.

The Department's veterinary staff, assisted by the police, made exhaustive inquiries to trace any other possible contacts. None were found. As a precaution however, a dog which had been bitten by the infected dog on 18 January 1970, was taken into quarantine, as was another dog which had strayed near the infected dog some 4–6 weeks before. Inquiries were extended to an area in north London which the owner visited with the infected dog shortly before the onset of the disease, but there was no known contact there. The infected dog was on a leash on the sole occasion that it was exercised while showing signs of the disease.

The dog was normally exercised on Newmarket Heath but was otherwise kept within the owner's house and yard.

Special inquiries were made on any possible risk to horses in the Newmarket area. The exercising arrangements for horses and for the infected dog left no scope for any form of contact or for transmission of the virus, nor was there any possibility of contact with wildlife. Foxes in the area were regularly destroyed by staff appointed by the Jockey Club and the Estate Gamekeepers. For these reasons and because the infected dog had the dumb form of rabies, it was determined that there was no need to take any further precautions in the Newmarket area.

Details of the total cost to the Department of carrying out these investigations are no longer available.

In the event of an outbreak of rabies occurring now, the Minister could declare an infected area, depending on the epidemiological circumstances of the outbreak. An infected area may be divided into zones and different control regimes may be applied in different zones.

Any or all of the following measures might be put into effect to ensure that the outbreak is contained and the virus eradicated:

(i) Restriction of movement of certain species into or out of the area

(ii) Control and confinement of specified animals in the area

(iii) Seizure, detention and disposal of specified animals not under proper control in the area

(iv) Compulsory vaccination of specified animals

(v) Prohibition of gatherings of specified animals, including for sporting and/or recreational activities

(vi) The destruction of foxes, game and/or other wildlife.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the principal species of wild animal involved in the transmission of rabies in Western Europe. [59041]

Mr. Rooker: The fox (*Vulpes vulpes*).

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the event of an outbreak of rabies, how many poison baits his Department could produce each day for use against the principal vector species; what poisons he would use; and what number and percentage of such species he would aim to eliminate in order to contain the outbreak. [59038]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's rabies outbreak contingency plan (currently under review) at present envisages that in the event of an outbreak of rabies, strychnine injected into dead day-old chicks would be used as bait to target the principal vector species, the fox. The Central Science Laboratory is capable of preparing over 8,000 baits ever 24 hours. Unadulterated baits would be laid for 7 to 10 days to encourage maximum bait uptake before poison baits would be laid. During this period, approximately 25,000 poison baits could be produced for use in the infected area. Any poison baits not taken up would be collected and destroyed three days later.

The number of foxes to be eliminated would depend upon the size of the control area and the local density of foxes. Evidence suggests that about 80 per cent. of foxes in rural habitats, and about 90 per cent. of foxes in urban habitats should ideally be eliminated in order to control an outbreak in the shortest possible time.

Wild Boar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if wild boar in captivity are subject to the same production, health and veterinary controls as domestic pigs. [58785]

Mr. Morley: Wild boar may be kept in captivity only under licence, issued by the relevant local authority under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 or under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981, as appropriate. Captive wild boar are subject to the same health and veterinary controls as domestic pigs.

Countryside Access

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is proposing to improve access to the countryside. [58813]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry is currently reviewing the provisions in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, ESA Scheme and the Countryside Access Scheme, under which land managers may receive payments for providing access to enclosed farmland. This review will be informed by the outcome of consultations on access to the open countryside, currently being conducted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Pesticide Approvals

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the names of applicants and the dates and the entire contents of applications for pesticide approvals are regarded as commercially confidential; and for what reasons the public is excluded from participating in decisions on such applications. [59046]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* While an application for pesticide approval is under evaluation, all the details are considered commercially confidential because there are considerable commercial interests at stake. If a company knows that a competitor has made an application for approval of a particular product, it will be able to anticipate when that product may come to the market and will be in a strong position to respond. In effect, the advance marketing plans for companies would be made known to competitors and customers.

If and when an approval is granted, the name of the approval holder, the product's name and its active ingredient or ingredients are included in the published notice. When an active ingredient is first approved, or when an existing one has been reviewed, we provide access to supporting data. Following the passage of the Pesticides Act 1998, we have consulted on proposals for further improving access to information on pesticides. One of these proposals is to allow access to the bulk of the data supporting applications for approval of individual products.

Decisions on applications for pesticide approvals are taken within a framework of UK and EU legislation and published rules. Decisions on individual applications are carried out within this framework, which requires consistent application of scientific standards for human and environmental safety and for efficacy. Ministers are guided in these matters by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides whose membership was recently expanded to include two lay members. The purpose of appointing lay members is to ensure that the Committee frames its advice in the light of the views of the general public.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 16 November 1998

DEFENCE

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [56005]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 22 October 1998]:* The Ministerial Code requires Ministers always to make efficient cost effective travel arrangements. In line with the practice of successive Administrations, officials (including Special Advisers) accompanying Ministers on overseas visits are entitled to use the same class of travel as the Minister they are accompanying, to facilitate briefings and discussions. As far as my Department is concerned I have been accompanied by a Special Adviser on the following overseas visits:

Date	*Country visited*	*Accompanying personnel*	*Number of special advisers*	*Cost (£)*
18 September	France	5	1	1,374
23–25 September	Portugal	16	1	7,588
5 and 6 October	Cyprus	2	1	8,332

Note:

All flights were by RAF aircraft and account for the bulk of the costs shown. The remaining costs were those which were also met by the Ministers offices' budget. Any additional costs for other members of the accompanying party are not held centrally and are excluded.

Cadet Forces

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cadets were enrolled in each of the cadet forces in *(a)* May 1979 and *(b)* May 1997; and how many are enrolled at the present time. [57171]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The numbers of cadets enrolled in the Cadet Forces at 31 March in each of the years in question were as follows:

	31 March 1979	*31 March 1997*	*31 March 1998*
Sea Cadet Corps	18,403	12,011	11,762
Army Cadet Force	44,878	39,827	40,773
Air Training Corps	34,445	33,196	32,807
Combined Cadet Force	44,093	39,716	39,460
Totals	141,819	124,750	124,802

The cadet organisation do not calculate their cadet numbers on a monthly basis, totals are normally taken at the end of the financial year. The given figures are therefore at 31 March for each of the years in question.

It should be noted that there is a possibility that the March 79 Sea Cadet Corps figure of 18,403 could include "Junior" members who are not enrolled into the Corps. "Junior" numbers currently stand at just over 3,000, and are not included in the March 97 and March 98 Sea Cadet figures.

VC10 (VIPs) Aeroplane

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *223*, and his subsequent letter of 2 November, if he will identify the *(a)* VIP fits and *(b)* modifications undertaken; and if he will list the special furniture purchased broken down by items costing in excess of £1,000. [58327]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* A "VIP fit" comprises a number of removable fittings which are provided to convert the interior of an aircraft to a standard appropriate for carrying VIP passengers. To date 6 divan bed settee units for the VC10 VIP fit are on order; there is no record of any other special purchases since 1 May 1997.

Four modifications have been made to the VC10 fleet since 1 May 1997. They are:

(a) The introduction of an embedded global positioning system inertial based navigation system.

(b) The introduction of an improved flight management system.

(c) A modification to the air to air refuelling pylon rear attachment fitting.

(d) The renewal of existing internal bodywork panels for C1K VC10 aircraft, that is, the type of VC10 aircraft most suited to carrying passengers.

Doctors

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many doctors are employed by his Department; and how they are allocated between services. [58744]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The numbers of doctors employed by the Ministry of Defence are as follows:

	Number
Royal Navy	226
Army	404
Royal Air Force	211
MOD Civilian	195

Notes:

1. Military figures are as at 1 September 1998.
2. Civilian figure is as at 9 November 1998.
3. The figure for civilian doctors comprises those staff working with the Armed Forces and those who provide an occupational health service to MOD civil servants. It does not include sessional doctors who are employed locally and for whom records are not held centrally.

Dry Docks (South America)

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the availability of dry dock facilities to Her Majesty's Navy in South America. [59151]

Mr. Doug Henderson: By negotiation, the Royal Navy makes use of dry dock facilities in South America, and indeed world-wide, as required and on an individual basis.

Nurses

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nurses are employed by his Department; and how they are allocated between the services. [59342]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The numbers of nurses employed by the Ministry of Defence are as follows:

	Nurses
Royal Navy	338
Army	716
Royal Air Force	297
MOD Civilian	364

Notes:
1. The figures are as at 1 September 1998.
2. The military figures include Registered Mental Nurses and trainees.
3. The figure for civilian nurses does not include those who are employed locally overseas and for whom records are not held centrally.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Ministry of Defence Police about the introduction of any necessary parallel changes to the Ministry of Defence police regulations following the reforms of complaints and discipline procedures for Home Department Police Forces announced by the Home Secretary on 23 March; and what changes he will now make. [58754]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) has set up a Working Group, chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable, including representation from the Defence Police Federation, to examine the new regulations for Home Department Police Forces and consider how they can best be applied to MDP officers. Following consideration of the Group's proposals, the Chief Constable will aim to implement any necessary changes by 1 April 1999 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what has caused the slippage in the installation of cockpit voice recorders in the RAF Chinook helicopter fleet from late spring 2000 to the end of the year 2000; and if he will make a statement; [58756]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *152–53*, if cockpit voice recorders will be fitted to the first six RAF Chinook helicopters by December 1998; and if he will make a statement. [58836]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* As part of the Health and Usage Monitoring System, HUMS, Cockpit Voice Recorders are expected to be fitted to the first six RAF Chinook helicopters by 30 June 1999. HUMS will be embodied in the full RAF Chinook fleet by December 2000. This represent a slippage of around 6 months against the previous programme dates, which is a result of technical difficulties encountered with the aircraft interface installation.

Defence Diversification Agency

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the running costs of the Defence Diversification Agency in each of the next two financial years. [59354]

Mr. Spellar: As we recently announced (Cm 4088, paragraph 11), we estimate that the operating budget of the Defence Diversification Agency will be of the order of £2 million per year.

Pilots (Resignation Requests)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fully-trained pilots have requested to leave the Army in each of the last five years. [59351]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Statistics for the number of fully trained pilots who have left the Army in each of the last five years at their own request are as follows:

Year	*Officers*	*Soldiers*	*Total*
1993	25	3	28
1994	20	4	24
1995	14	3	17
1996	14	4	18
1997	16	9	25
1998[1]	18	12	30
Totals	107	35	142

[1] As at 11 November 1998

Child Support Agency

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the memorandum of understanding between his Department and the Child Support Agency relating to pay and allowances taken into account in determining CSA settlements. [59428]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Defence and the Child Support Agency is an inter-Departmental internal working document which determines the administrative procedures to be followed by the two Departments when an absent parent is a serving or former member of the Armed Forces. The Memorandum does not cover any financial issues regarding pay and allowances taken into account in determining CSA settlements; policy for which rests with the CSA. A copy of the latest version of the Memorandum will be placed in the Library.

Information Warfare Incidents

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Government-wide unified incident reporting and alert scheme on information warfare incidents was established; and if he will make a statement. [59427]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 12 November 1998]*: UNIRAS—the IT unified incident reporting and alert scheme—was introduced in April 1992 and records all reported IT security incidents across Government. Following a review of protective security in Government departments and agencies, responsibility for the management and operation of the scheme was transferred from the Control Computer and Telecommunications Agency, CCTA, to the Security Service in August 1994. The aim of the scheme is to monitor, analyse and raise awareness of IT security incidents, including any which may involve electronic attack affecting the secure operation of Government Systems.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Government will announce measures for the defence of critical national information technology infrastructure. [59429]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 12 November 1998]*: The Government are aware of a number of potential threats to the critical national IT infrastructure and a range of security measures is already in place to protect the associated IT systems. I have nothing to add to the announcement I gave in the Adjournment Debate of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 987–92, on Information Warfare, that the Government hope to announce shortly a package of measures that will further ensure adequate defence of key systems in the critical national infrastructure.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59748]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Minister for the Armed Forces to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 8 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *532*.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what child care provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this child care; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59718]

Mr. Spellar: My Department and its agencies provide 15 workplace nurseries at an average cost to parents of £72 per week for a full time place. These facilities, together with a number of places purchased in off-site private sector nurseries provide some 600 places to the children of Service and civilian personnel working in Ministry of Defence establishments. In addition, my Department subsidises a number of places in holiday playschemes for children of school age. Information about the number and proportion of Service and civilian personnel who used these facilities during the last two financial years is not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Museums

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what partnership funding he will make available to the military museums under their bid for millennium lottery money to improve access and education at the museums. [58335]

Mr. Spellar: The six principal museums and the 69 Regimental and Corps Museums supported from public funds have not approached the Ministry of Defence (MOD) for additional funding support for HLF Millennium Lottery Funding. The MOD funds the six principal museums through Grant In Aid, and provides financial support in the form of funding of salaries and the provision of accommodation to 69 Regimental and Corps Museums. This provides a firm base from which museums are able to raise partnership funding privately. A bid by a number of the Regimental and Corps museums for £1.5m from the HLF is being co-ordinated by the Army Museums Ogilby Trust.

Territorial Army

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the letter written by the Commander in Chief Land Command on 26 October 1998 threatening to court martial soldiers who spoke to *(a)* the press and *(b)* hon. Members about proposed TA cuts; and if the letter was authorised by him. [59926]

Mr. George Robertson: The Commander-in-Chief did not need my authorisation to issue his letter, which I have placed in the Library of the House; but he has my full support in his action to remind those under his command of their duty.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Roads and Pavements

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the legislation covering local authorities' duties of care towards the public in respect of *(a)* roads and *(b)* pavements; and if he will make a statement. [58199]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 gives highway authorities a duty to maintain those highways which are maintainable at the public expense. This duty also applies to the maintenance of footways and bridleways where these are highways maintainable at the public expense.

Section 58 of the Act gives a defence for highway authorities in actions for damage resulting from their failure to maintain a highway which is maintainable at the public expense. There is now a substantial amount of case law on what care highway authorities should exercise to secure that the highway is not dangerous to traffic. Highway authorities and their insurers are guided by this when new claims arise.

In view of the large body of case law on highway authorities duty of care, the present legislation is clear and there are no plans to introduce new legislation.

Radioactive Material

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what permissions are required before BNFL is allowed to transport radioactive material by road. [58342]

Ms Glenda Jackson: BNFL, in common with any other operator, would require some or all of the following permissions, over and above those required for any other road transport operation, depending on the quantity and nature of the radioactive material:

Certification of Vocational Driver Training;

Approval by DETR of the material;

Approval by DETR of the package design;

Approval by DETR of the shipment;

Approval of the Director of Civil Nuclear Security.

Those permissions conform fully with the safety and security recommendations of the International Atomic Energy Agency and directives of the European Union.

Additional requirements, including import/export controls, may apply where the transport forms part of a transboundary shipment.

Housing Needs Surveys

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in which years each local authority in England completed its most recent Housing Needs Survey. [58738]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, some information on surveys of stock condition is collected from authorities in their annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP1) returns. The information collected in 1997 is summarised in the 1997 "HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Shopping Centres

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to support high quality expansion of existing district shopping centres as an aid to encouraging *(a)* competition and *(b)* additional investment in nearby shopping centres. [58855]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's policy is to focus additional retail investment in existing centres. Proposals for extensions of regional shopping centres should be brought forward through Regional Planning Guidance. In the case of town and district centres, local planning authorities should establish in their development plans where they wish to encourage additional retail development and investment, including (where appropriate) expansion to existing shopping centres. The aim should be to improve competitiveness and provide a better service for the local community but without undermining the vitality and viability of other existing centres.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on Government policy in respect of *(a)* in town and *(b)* out of town supermarket developments; [58885]

(2) what factors he takes into account when considering planning applications by supermarket chains for *(a)* town and *(b)* out of town stores. [58882]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's policy is set out in our Response to the House of Commons Environment Committee report on Shopping Centres (Cmnd 3729). This reaffirmed our commitment to the policy set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 6 (PPG6: Town Centres and Retail Developments). The Government have clarified that the policy in PPG6 applies just as much to proposals to extend existing retail development as it does to new supermarkets.

The policy aims to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of our city, town and district centres, by focusing new development and investment, particularly for retail and leisure uses, in these centres; and to provide a wide range of facilities to meet people's day-to-day needs accessible by a choice of means of transport.

Local planning authorities should develop a plan-led approach to accommodating new retail development. Having considered the need for new development, both local authorities and developers should then apply the sequential approach to selecting sites for accommodating additional development. We expect new supermarkets to be located in existing centres or failing that, on the edge of such centres, and for the store to be of an appropriate size for the role and function of the centre.

Exceptionally, applications are called in for determination by the Secretary of State. In deciding such cases, the Secretary of State takes account of all relevant policy and the recommendations of the Inspector who conducted the public inquiry.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning decisions have been called in since 1 January; and how many of these concern food retailing. [59075]

Mr. Raynsford: Information is collected quarterly. In the first three quarters of 1998 (1 January to 30 September), 102 planning applications were called in, of which 17 involved some element of food retailing.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the concessionary travel schemes available to pensioners in each local authority in the West Midlands region; and the costs of each scheme. [58875]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Concessionary travel schemes are a matter for local authorities, and my Department does not have details of schemes for pensioners. But the overall costs reported by local authorities of concessionary travel schemes (covering elderly, blind and disabled people and

children) for the 1996–97 financial year for each local authority in area covered by the Government Office for the West Midlands are as follows:

Concessionary fares for elderly, blind and disabled people and children (excluding school travel): Outturn 1996–97

Local Authority	*Net current expenditure (£000)*
Hereford & Worcester	0
Bromsgrove	197
Hereford	92
Leominster	14
Malvern Hills	6
Redditch	622
South Herefordshire	175
Worcester	327
Wychavon	457
Wyre Forest	224
Shropshire	57
Bridgnorth	125
North Shropshire	108
Oswestry	62
Shrewsbury & Atcham	187
South Shropshire	24
The Wrekin	401
Staffordshire	0
Cannock Chase	648
East Staffordshire	539
Lichfield	152
Newcastle-under-Lyme	262
South Staffordshire	446
Stafford	422
Staffordshire Moorlands	136
Stoke-on-Trent	681
Tamworth	183
Warwickshire	0
North Warwickshire	148
Nuneaton & Bedworth	652
Rugby	190
Stratford-on-Avon	149
Warwick	323
Birmingham	475
Coventry	21
Dudley	66
Sandwell	268
Solihull	30
Walsall	367
Wolverhampton	141
West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority	55,370
Government Office West Midlands	64,747

A50

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the total costs of the A50 road construction in Stoke-on-Trent, *(b)* the original anticipated costs of this scheme and *(c)* the costs of Phase 1B of the scheme, indicating separately claims by the contractor due to contract overrun. [58835]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. George Stevenson, dated 16 November 1998:

The Transport Minister, Glenda Jackson, has asked Lawrie Haynes to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the A50 Blythe Bridge to Queensway scheme. I am replying in Mr. Haynes's absence.

The total cost of the work carried out under the three main contracts is likely to outturn at around £123m.

When the scheme entered the road programme in 1987 the work cost was estimated at £36m. But the scheme changed considerably as design work developed and shortly before work started in 1993, we estimated that the works costs would be in the order of £80m. Work was carried out under the Institution of Civil Engineers' standard form of contract under which a number of risks remain with the employer and the contractor is paid for the actual, rather than the estimated, work done. The contracts were also index linked for inflation. Apart from inflation costs rose because the contractors had to cope with unforeseen ground conditions, the diversion of uncharted statutory utility services and consequential design changes, and the introduction of Landfill Tax.

A disadvantage of this type of contract is the uncertainty of cost and time. As part of the Agency's procurement initiative we are now using other forms of contract which share risks more equitably.

Payments to the main contractor on Phase 1B total £50m of which £3.7m is for claims relating to the extension of the contract to allow for, among other things, unforeseen ground conditions.

All costs quoted exclude VAT, the cost of Preparation and Supervision, and the costs of land acquisition and other compensation payments.

Oil Spills (St. Kilda)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate the Government have made as to how quickly a spill from the nearest tranche offered for oil production could reach the islands of St. Kilda. [59021]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The nearest point to St. Kilda currently under licence is 45 miles South South West (SSW) of the Islands. Exploration is still at an early stage and it is not yet known whether hydrocarbons are present in any quantity or what their characteristic would be. Before any such structure could be drilled, better predictions would need to be available and any such well would be subject to the Merchant Shipping (Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response Convention) Regulations 1998. These require the prior provision of an oil spill contingency plan specific to the well site and the rig to be used which must be approved by the Department of Trade and Industry.

In the worst case scenario, it is estimated that should a release of oil occur 45 miles to the SSW of St. Kilda the oil would impact on the Islands after a period of between 36 to 48 hours if it had not already been dispersed in the prevailing wind and seas.

A14

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the proposed A14 multi-modal study will begin; and how long it will take to complete. [59298]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We will shortly be consulting regional planning conferences on the timing for all the studies proposed in A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England. We expect the study to take at least a year to complete.

Taxis (Smoking)

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to allow London taxi drivers to enforce No Smoking signs in their vehicles. [59486]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *241*.

Water Craft (Byelaws)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to implement the recommendations of the Review of Byelaw powers for the Coast, drawn up by the Interdepartmental Working Party; and if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to establishing controls over the use of jet-skis and other personal powered water craft. [59377]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On 7 October, at the official launch of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), I announced the Government's continuing commitment to improve the safety and management of recreational craft through a three-strand strategy. First, safety education initiatives will continue to be pursued by the MCA. Second, and importantly, the MCA will develop a Code of Conduct for all types of recreational craft, including personal watercraft (for example "Jetskis") which will cover best and safe practice together with a voluntary registration and identification scheme. The Code will be developed by the Sea Safety Liaison Group which, in addition to the MCA, comprises representatives of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Royal Yachting Association, Royal Life Saving Society UK and the British Marine Industries Federation, and will be subject to external consultation before being launched next summer.

The third strand of the Government's strategy is a long term commitment to primary legislation to enable local authorities to have better control, through byelaws, of their coastal waters. This commitment follows acceptance of the recommendations of the review of coastal byelaws by an Inter-Departmental working party led by the Countryside Division of my Department. Following extensive consultation, the working party recommended that:

(a) that local authority powers need to be consolidated in one place, and updated;

(b) any powers must include the ability to provide exclusive bathing zones where all type of craft, powered and non-powered, can be excluded;

(c) local authorities should be given more general byelaw powers (with safeguards to prevent indiscriminate use) to regulate activities affecting the wider environment, and;

(d) any extension of, or amendment to, byelaw powers should not conflict or overlap with powers held by other authorities.

Having consulted Ministerial colleagues, I have decided to accept these recommendations. The Government intend to pursue the primary legislation needed to bring them into effect in due course. Copies of the Working Party's report "Review of Byelaw Powers for the Coast" are available and have been deposited in the House Library.

Taken together, I believe this strategy will do a great deal to improve the safety and enjoyment of the ever increasing numbers of people who use our coasts for recreation.

Leasehold Reform

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will make a statement on his policy on commonhold and further leasehold reforms; and if he will make a statement. [59414]

Mr. Raynsford: We hope to consult on proposals for leasehold reform very shortly. The Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for commonhold but I understand that consultation on its introduction will follow in due course. These two initiatives are linked and we are liaising closely to ensure consistent proposals.

Right to Buy

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the list of tenants' organisations circulated with the Secure Tenants' Right to Buy consultation paper. [59531]

Mr. Raynsford: The consultation paper was circulated to English local authorities and registered social landlords who were encouraged to bring it to the attention of their tenants, so that these could comment directly or via their landlord. The Department does not have a list of their tenants' organisations or of those who may have received a copy of the paper from their landlord.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what the maximum discount is under the right-to-buy scheme at present; and what it will be under the Government's new proposals; [59620]

(2) what the *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum reductions in the right-to-buy discounts will be as a result of the Government's changes to the existing discount scheme; [59622]

(3) he will make a statement on the Government's proposals to reduce the maximum discount for council home tenants wishing to buy their homes under the right-to-buy. [59621]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing in her written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *124–25*, which set out the Government's proposals in detail. She said that the Government were publishing a consultation paper. This proposed to replace the current £50,000 cash limit on discount with nine regional limits ranging from £22,000 in the North East to £38,000 in London and the South East, reflecting council house prices in each region.

We are now considering responses to the consultation paper. It is anticipated that the change would affect approximately 1 in 4 buyers in London. Of those, some may receive a few hundred pounds less discount than if they had applied before the change came into force. The maximum theoretical reduction in discount will range from £28,000 in the North-East to £12,000 in London. However, the effect on any individual buyer will depend on a range of factors including the value of the property, the region in which it is located, and the number of years' tenancy which entitle the buyer to added discount.

Closed Railway Lines

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list

the abandoned railway routes that are owned by British Rail, in each instance listing *(a)* the length in kilometres, *(b)* how long they have been closed and *(c)* the commercial value of the land. [59688]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Closed lines owned by the British Railways Board, which are a mile or more long, are as follows:

	Approximate mileage
Akeman Street to Grendon Underwood	2
Apethorn Junction to Codley Junction	2.5
Ashton—Park Bridge branch	2.5
Bere Alston to Tavistock (not a continuous length)	6
Bowling branch, Bradford	1
Bridgeton to Parkhead (London Road tunnels only)	1
Brodsworth Colliery branch	1.5
Cambus to Menstrie	2
Catesby Tunnel, Charwelton	2.5
Chorlton Junction to Old Trafford	1.5
Colne—Foulridge (part)	3
Darngavel	1
Dereham to North Elmham	5
Drewton Tunnel, Little Weighton	1
Dumfries to Maxwelltown	3
Finnieston to Kirklee	1.25
Fletton Junction to Longville Junction	1
Glazebrook to Partington	2
Greenock Princes Pier branch	3
Hamilton to Larkhall (part)	1.25
Hartley to Stenkirth	1
Hyde Road to Gorton and Fairfield	1.5
Kelvinside branch (Urban tunnels)	1
Limekiln Junction to Oakdale (leasehold)	9
Luton to Dunstable	5
Mickleover to Mackworth	1
Muirkirk	1.75
Nuneaton avoiding line	1
Paisley St. James—Linwood branch	1
Queensbury Tunnel, Queensbury	1.5
Skegby branch (part)	1.25
Strathaven	1
Van branch, Caersws (not a continuous length)	4.5
Warrington—Latchford	1.5

Line lengths are shown in miles rather than kilometres as the Board's records are kept in miles and are approximations. BR also own numerous sections less than a mile long but details of these could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Board has no readily accessible comprehensive record of line closure dates. The bulk of the closures occurred some 30 years ago and the relevant records have been or are in the process of, being lodged with the Public Record Office.

It is not possible to state a commercial value of the land. This depends on what alternative uses may be available including what planning permission might be obtained, assuming an alternative development is permitted at all. Such a valuation would be commercially confidential during the sale process.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to promote the re-opening of disused rail lines. [59664]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Our White Paper announced that additional money will be available to encourage further investment in three main areas of the rail network. Over £100 million will be made available over the next three years to increase the level of freight grant and to set up two new funds. The Infrastructure Investment Fund will support strategic investment projects aimed at addressing capacity constraints. The Railway Passenger Partnership Fund will enhance local and regional services and be targeted at proposals that promote modal shift and integration with other modes. These two funds will be administered by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF). Full details of the criteria that OPRAF will use in assessing applications will be announced shortly.

Train Paths

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of the allocation by Railtrack of train paths between freight and passenger traffic. [59674]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Railtrack allocate train paths to train operators in accordance with the access rights which the operators hold and with the operators' bids for paths. All track access agreements are subject to approval by the Rail Regulator.

Our White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" (Cmnd 3950) announced that the proposed Strategic Rail Authority would review the capacity of the railway, assess investment needs and identify priorities where operators' aspirations conflict. Pending legislation, the shadow Strategic Rail Authority, to be established next spring, will make a start on this work.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the potential for congestion charging to reduce traffic levels. [59689]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Estimates have been made for a number of urban areas including central London (quoted in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", page 116) and Bristol, Derby, Leeds, Reading and Sheffield, in the Transport Research Laboratory study "Impact of Transport Policies in Five Cities". Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Commission for Integrated Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what role the Commission for Integrated Transport will play in helping to ensure that financial inconsistencies between the criteria for road and rail projects are eliminated. [59691]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government have stated in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" that they are developing a new approach to the appraisal of different solutions to transport problems, and that they intend that this approach should be applied to the appraisal of all transport projects, including proposals for all road schemes. The Commission for Integrated Transport, in providing independent advice to the Government, will be reviewing and monitoring progress towards the objectives set out in the White Paper.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if the Strategic Rail Authority will have *(a)* the power and *(b)* the duty to draw up network development plans for main lines; [59680]

(2) what assessment he has made of capacity problems within the rail network. [59678]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Railtrack is responsible for the stewardship of the railway network. Its 1998 Network Management Statement identifies the key locations on the network with current and predicted congestion problems. Railtrack has agreed with the Rail Regulator to complete an evaluation of options to address these capacity problems by 30 November.

The shadow Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) will start work on strategic planning of the network, as part of an integrated transport policy and as an input to the Rail Regulator's review of access charges. Subject to legislation, the statutory SRA will have a duty to formulate, and keep under review, a strategy for the operation and development of railways in Britain.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Strategic Rail Authority will be subject to the proposed freedom of information legislation. [59679]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Yes, subject to legislation.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy to allow British Rail to bid for future rail franchises. [59675]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Subject to legislation, the British Railways Board will become part of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). The SRA will let all new franchises and will act as the public sector operator of last resort. Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 30 September that we will enable the revitalised British Railways Board to step in if any of the franchises fails for whatever reason.

Ports Policy

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the forthcoming paper on ports policy will explicitly endorse the strategic importance of Newhaven; and if he will make a statement. [59694]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister indicated in a Written Answer on 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *28*, that it is proposed to publish a ports policy paper, which we hope to have ready in the Spring. It is too early to discuss how it might address such specific issues as the role of particular ports.

Freight

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on rail freight of the introduction of 44-tonne lorries. [59690]

Ms Glenda Jackson: 44 tonne lorries have been allowed in the UK for combined road/rail transport in the UK since 1994. A Department of Transport survey in 1995 showed that over 50 per cent. of the laden journeys to or from Channel Tunnel rail freight terminals by vehicles licensed to operate at 44 tonnes were at weights over 38 tonnes.

We announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" that the Commission for Integrated Transport will be asked to consider the case for allowing 44 tonne lorries, on 6 axles, for general use. Their consideration will take into account the potential effects on rail freight.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the average cost of moving freight per kilometre by *(a)* road, *(b)* rail and *(c)* air. [59692]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many additional miles of railway track have been electrified in each of the last 10 years. [59682]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *441*.

Dutch Transport Information Service

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the Dutch transport information service; and what plans he has to introduce a similar scheme in the UK. [59681]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am aware of the Dutch transport information system. It was taken into account in the formulation of the aim set out in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" for a UK public transport information system, with a target date of operation of 2000.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59745]

Mr. Raynsford: This information is not held centrally.

Transport Construction Costs

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the average cost of constructing one kilometre of *(a)* a twin-track railway, *(b)* a two-way road, *(c)* a motorway, *(d)* a footpath and *(e)* a cycle lane. [59687]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Average costs are not available for railways. Costs vary enormously, reflecting topographical, structural and operational factors.

The average cost of roads and motorways also vary widely due to similar factors, although indicative average cost ranges are available. The average cost range per km for a single lane, two-way road is £1.2-£2.2 million. For a three lane motorway, the average cost range per km is £3.9-£7.2 million.

Average costs are not available for cycle lanes. Since cycle lanes use the existing carriageway of a road and are identified by markings and signs, costs are not high. The creation of stand-alone cycle tracks will be more costly, costs depending upon a variety of considerations including location and the materials used in construction.

Average costs are not available for footpaths. Again these would vary enormously depending upon location and the materials used in construction.

Motorcycles

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to encourage the provision of secure parking for motorcycles. [59665]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government are in favour of the provision of secure parking for motorcycles and have agreed to support and provide drafting assistance for a Private Peers Bill which Lord Rotherwick intends to introduce in the next session to facilitate such provision.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of the practice of banning motorcyclists from riding for six months if they fail to obtain a full licence within two years; and if he will make a statement. [59686]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Current legislation is that, if a learner motorcyclist fails to pass his driving test within two years of getting their provisional licence, he may not ride a motorcycle for 12 months. Driver licensing records indicate that the two year validity period for provisional motorcycle licences affects very few learner riders; 555 in the 12 months to June 1998, around 0.25 per cent. of the 220,000 provisional motorcycle licences issued in a year. Surveys indicate that on average learner riders take their motorcycle tests 4–5 months after their initial training.

The limited validity period for provisional motorcycle licences is intended to improve road safety by encouraging learner riders to get to test standard without undue delay. None the less, the Government recognise that the current arrangement is not popular with some motorcyclists. A Consultation Paper seeking views about how the rules might be altered was published in July and copies were placed in the House Library. We are currently considering the responses that we have received.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the potential *(a)* increased use of and *(b)* safety implications of the use of (i) cycle lanes and (ii) bus lanes by motorcycles. [59685]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There has been no assessment of the potential increased use and safety implications of the use of cycle lanes by motorcycles. Cycle lanes exist to give encouragement to people to cycle. Studies have been conducted on allowing motorcycles to use bus lanes in Bristol and Reading but the results were inconclusive in safety terms.

The Department would welcome proposals by local authorities to conduct comprehensive before and after monitored studies to help inform decisions on whether there is a case for motorcyclists to be allowed to use bus lanes.

Drink Driving

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much the Government have spent in the last five years to reduce drink driving. [59676]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government have spent £11.8 million on anti-drink-drive publicity campaigns in the last 5 years. Other Central Government expenditure for this purpose cannot be separately identified.

Standard Spending Assessments

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what was the standard spending assessment for Surrey County Council for each of the last 10 years in *(a)* all services, *(b)* education, *(c)* the police and *(d)* personal social services; and what forecast he has made of the level of Surrey's spending needs in the next financial year; [60038]

(2) what was the standard spending assessment for each London borough for each of the last 10 years in *(a)* all services, *(b)* education, *(c)* the police and *(d)* personal social services; and what forecast he has made of changes in the level of London boroughs' spending needs in the next financial year. [60050]

Ms Armstrong: Standard Spending Assessments were first used for the distribution of Revenue Support Grant in 1990–91. The information requested can be found in the relevant "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook" from 1990–91 to 1998–99, copies of which were placed in the Library. We will announce our proposals for Standard Spending Assessments for 1999–2000 around the usual time in late November to early December.

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what contribution the area cost adjustment made to the standard spending assessment of each London borough in respect of *(a)* all services, *(b)* education, *(c)* the police and *(d)* personal social services in each of the last 10 years; [60046]

(2) what contribution the area cost adjustment made to the standard spending assessment which Surrey received in respect of *(a)* all services, *(b)* education, *(c)* the police and *(d)* personal social services in each of the last 10 years; [60051]

(3) how much cost adjustment each London borough received for each of the last 10 years; and what was the proportion of area cost adjustment to standard spending assessment in each of those years; [60047]

(4) how much area cost adjustment Surrey has received for each of the last 10 financial years; and what was the proportion of area cost adjustment to standard spending assessment in each year. [60037]

Ms Armstrong: Standard Spending Assessments were first used for the distribution of Revenue Support Grant in 1990–91. The area cost adjustment used in Standard Spending Assessments for each local authority is set out for the relevant years in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) and its amendment reports from 1990–91 to 1992–93 and in the Local Government Finance Report (England) from 1993–94 to 1998–99.

The contribution of the area cost adjustment to standard spending assessments as a proportion of the total standard spending assessment, and the contribution of the area cost adjustment to standard spending assessments for *(a)* all services, *(b)* education, *(c)* the police and *(d)* personal social services, for each local authority for 1994–95, 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 are set out in tables which have been placed in the Library. For earlier years the information is not available. An approximation to much of the information requested for those years can be found in the "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook" for each year, copies of which were placed in the Library.

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what options he is considering for changes to the criteria for the area cost adjustment for the London boroughs in next year's financial settlement; and if he will list the financial implications of each option; [60048]

(2) what options he is considering for changes to the criteria for the area cost adjustment for Surrey in next year's financial settlement; and if he will outline the financial implications of each option. [60036]

Ms Armstrong: The Report of the Standard Spending Assessments Sub-Group for 1999–2000 identified a range of options for changing the Area Cost Adjustment and provided exemplifications of their effect for individual authorities. A copy of the Report is available in the House Library.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what restrictions apply to the conveyance of passenger vehicles fuelled by autogas through the Channel Tunnel; and what is the safety case for these restrictions. [59811]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Eurotunnel do not at present convey vehicles powered by autogas. They will need to make a safety case if they decide in principle to accept such vehicles.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* level of tolls on the Severn Bridge, *(b)* introduction of two way tolling and *(c)* concessions for local commuters. [59561]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Severn Bridges Act 1992 provides for the tolls charged at the Severn Bridges to increase annually in line with the RPI, rounded to a convenient sum. Since 1 January 1998 the tolls have been £4.00 for a car and £8.40 and £12.10 for larger vehicles. As of 1 January 1999 these tolls will rise to £4.20, £8.40 and £12.50, respectively. The Act provides for one-way tolling and for concessionary tolls. Severn Bridge Crossing plc offer a concession for regular users who pay monthly for a tag. There are no plans for the government to legislate to change the current toll structure.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what child care provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this child care; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59719]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Child care provision is an integral part of my Department's equal opportunities policy. It enables staff to combine their work and domestic responsibilities and helps the Department to maximise talent. Child care provision is one of a range of "family friendly" measures provided and continuing to be developed; others include 18 weeks paid maternity leave at full pay, career breaks up to five years; 5 days paid paternity leave, special leave for domestic emergencies, flexible working, including part-time working, job sharing and home working.

My Department supports child care provision in accordance with existing central guidance where there is a business case and a value for money justification which meets both staff and organisational needs. Subsidies are provided but parents are required to make a contribution towards the cost. Supported workplace nursery places are available for staff at inter-departmental nurseries in Westminster, Hastings and Bristol. In the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98 the cost to parents was as follows:

£

Nursery	*Year 1996–97 cost per week per place*	*Year 1997–98 cost per week per place*
Westminster	74	76
Hastings	64	64
Bristol	70	70

Staff with school age children benefit from inter-departmental holiday play schemes at various locations, including Westminster and Bristol at an average cost to parents of £8 per child per day.

In the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98 the number of parents using these facilities was 54 and 41 respectively, representing 1 per cent. of total staff.

These figures related to the central department only. Agency Chief Executives are responsible for equal opportunities policies, including child care provision, in the agencies.

Traffic Forecasts

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 29, on what date revised traffic forecasts will be available. [59616]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As I explained to the hon. Member in my answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 29, the Department is currently planning a work programme to take forward revisions of the 1997 National Road Traffic Forecasts to reflect the impact of the New Deal for Transport. Once this planning work is complete and we have had an opportunity to consult the Commission for Integrated Transport we will be able to set a target date for the publication of a new set of forecasts.

Planning Policy Guidance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to issue new planning policy guidance on housing. [59669]

Mr. Raynsford: I expect to publish the draft of the new PPG3 on Housing for consultation in the New Year.

Telecommunications

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to change planning controls over development carried out by licensed telecommunications code system operators. [60158]

Mr. Caborn: In July 1998 we published for public comment a number of proposed changes to the permitted development rights granted to licensed telecommunications code system operators under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (GPDO). These were set out in the consultation paper "Telecommunications Development Control". The proposed changes reflected the Government's commitment to striking the right balance between encouraging the establishment of an efficient and modern national telecommunications network and protecting the environment.

Our main proposal was for the introduction of a new two-stage "prior approval" procedure in respect of applications for ground-based masts in sensitive locations in order to allow for greater public consultation over their siting and appearance. Respondents to the consultation paper were highly supportive of the principle of increasing the opportunity for public comment. However, a number of local planning authorities and telecommunications operators expressed concern over the complexity of the procedure proposed. There were also concerns that the introduction of a distinction between sensitive and non-sensitive sites would lead to uncertainty about how any application was going to be handled and how long it would take, and would disadvantage those living in non-sensitive areas. We have taken account of these concerns and concluded that we should proceed with a new single-stage prior approval procedure of 42 days for ground-based masts. This will include a requirement that the operator should erect a site notice to publicise the development proposed. The revised approach will provide the public with a clear opportunity to comment to the local planning authority on the siting and appearance of all proposals to erect ground-based masts under the GPDO.

A clear majority of the respondents supported our other proposals for changes to the GPDO, particularly those to strengthen planning controls over telecommunications development in Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The Department is now preparing the necessary GPDO Amendment Order and guidance to implement the changes and will consult on drafts. The draft guidance will include advice on the possible use of planning obligations to secure mast sharing, taking into account the comments received in the recent consultation exercise.

The Government attach great importance to minimise the impact of telecommunications infrastructure on the environment. The new prior approval procedure for ground-based masts and strengthened planning controls in SSSIs will contribute to that objective. Our planning policies are already directed to making good use of existing masts and buildings for the installation of new antennas and to encouraging operators and local planning authorities to work together to identify mast sites that are satisfactory from both an environmental and a technical point of view.

I am, however, keen to discuss with the telecommunications industry what more can be done on all sides to minimise the environmental impact of new telecommunications development. To that end I shall be meeting with representatives of the industry at the earliest available opportunity.

Greening Government Initiative

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the response to the Second Report of the Environmental Audit Committee on the Greening Government initiative (HC 517) will be published. [59943]

Mr. Prescott: I am pleased to announce the publication today of the Government's response to the Environmental Audit Committee Report on Greening Government. We have been able to take on board and respond positively to many of the Committee's recommendations. I congratulate the Environmental Audit Committee on taking a broad and constructive approach in its Greening Government report, and welcome its intention to keep the issues it raises under review.

This response promises early action in a number of important areas:

The terms of reference of ENV (the Cabinet Committee on the Environment) have been amended to make it explicit that its remit includes co-ordination of sustainable development issues.

Green Ministers will report regularly to ENV Committee and will prepare an annual report on their activities for publication; the first published report will be next summer.

Sir Richard Wilson will be reissuing the Guide to Cabinet Committee Business reminding Departments to consider any significant environmental costs and benefits of proposals in papers for Cabinet Committees, seeking DETR's views as appropriate. We shall be reviewing this system at the end of 1999; I want to be sure that it is delivering the changes that I am determined will be made.

Where possible Departments will consult on and make available their environmental appraisals.

By the end of this Parliament I want each Department to have begun introducing an environmental management system where deemed efficient and cost-effective and to have collected a set of examples of good practice, in greening policies and operations.

Whenever Government create a new body we shall consider the case for incorporating sustainable development into its remit. I have asked Green Ministers to consider and report to the Cabinet Committee on the Environment on how far sustainable development can be incorporated into the remit of all existing Departments and NDPBs.

British Waterways

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for recruiting a new Chairman for British Waterways. [60232]

Mr. Meale: The appointment of the current chairman of the Board of British Waterways (BW), Bernard Henderson, expires next April.

I have appointed recruitment consultants, Saxton Bampfylde Hever plc, to assist in identifying suitable potential candidates to succeed Mr. Henderson. I have asked the consultants to provide a preliminary list of names by the end of November.

The new Chairman's main priority will be to implement the Government's forthcoming decisions on BW's future. The selected candidate will need to have the skills, experience, ability and vision to lead a public sector business with a turnover of over £100m per annum and 1,700 employees and to develop successful and innovative partnerships with the private, public and voluntary sectors, including substantial funding activities.

City Challenge

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the City Challenge schemes currently in operation, stating for each the number or amount of *(a)* private sector leverage, *(b)* development completed, *(c)* net jobs created, *(d)* jobs preserved, *(e)* land reclaimed and *(f)* new business start-ups. [59076]

Mr. Meale: There is only one City Challenge scheme currently in operation—North Tyneside—which, exceptionally, was granted a sixth year, until March 1999, to complete its programme. Government funding for the first round of eleven City Challenge Pacemaker partnerships came to an end in March 1997 and for 19 of the remaining 20 second round partnerships in March 1998.

The latest key outputs for North Tyneside, taken from their 1997–98 Annual Report, are:

(a) £1,262.3 million private sector leverage;

(b)(i) 3,027 dwellings completed/improved;

(ii) 280,431 sq.m. of new/improved business and commercial floorspace;

(c) 4,701 net permanent jobs created;

(d) 6,281 jobs preserved;

(e) 192 hectares of land reclaimed/improved; and

(f) 344 new business start-ups.

Ofwat

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what monitoring he carries out on the composition of the regional customer service committees appointed by the Director of Ofwat. [59336]

Mr. Meale: Information about appointments to, and the composition of, the regional Customer Service Committees established by the Director General of Water Services are contained in his Annual Reports, copies of which are in the Library. Biographical details about Chairmen and Members of the Committees are published in their Annual Reports 'Representing Water Customers', copies of which are also in the Library and can be found on the OFWAT web site.

I understand that the Director General aims to ensure that membership of the committees is drawn from all sections of the community so that each committee has members with a wide range of expertise and backgrounds, including knowledge of the difficulties facing customers with special needs and those from different ethnic groups.

Beverage Containers

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce a deposit system for beverage containers; and if he will make a statement. [59560]

Mr. Meale: The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997, which came into force in March 1997, place obligations on certain businesses to recover and recycle specified tonnages of packaging waste based on the amount of packaging that they handle.

The Regulations do not have particular provisions on re-use beyond the fact that producers do not have to include the tonnage of packaging they are re-using in the calculation of their obligation. Re-using packaging can therefore significantly reduce compliance costs.

There are no plans to introduce a mandatory deposit system for beverage containers in the UK. We would want to look carefully at whether such a measure would contravene European law because it would penalise producers of single trip packaging because it could be anti-competitive.

However, there is nothing to prevent businesses from introducing deposit systems themselves, and some may indeed do so to ensure that their re-use systems are as effective as possible.

Rail Fares

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *109*, what briefing he received on the research by OPRAF published on 22 October before 30 September. [59504]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* My right hon. Friend's office received a letter about this research on 21 September. He was briefed on it in October.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the Environmental Stakeholders Forum for Genetic Modifications to be in operation; and what its terms of reference will be. [59684]

Mr. Meale: Further to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment's statement to the House of Lords Select Committee on 21 October, we are currently exploring how best to take forward the concept of an Environmental Stakeholders Forum. No decision has yet been made on the establishment of such a group or on its terms of reference.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the ecological monitoring of farm-scale trials of genetically modified crops will involve; and if he will make a statement. [59683]

Mr. Meale: The specification and details for the ecological monitoring of farm scale plantings of genetically modified crops are still in the early stages of development. An announcement will be made in due course.

Waterways (Pollution)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the role of construction companies in the pollution of waterways in the UK; and if he will give a breakdown by industry of pollution incidents in waterways since 1990. [59693]

Mr. Meale: The Environment Agency report "Water Pollution Incidents in England and Wales 1997", published in June 1998, reported that there were 588 substantiated construction industry pollution incidents in 1997. This represents an increase of 15% from the previous year (509 incidents in 1996).

The Agency identified two main problems on construction sites. The first major problem, silt, can be dealt with through careful management of surface water run-off. The second is oil storage. The Government are considering the need for new controls to set minimum standards for industrial and commercial oil storage installations which will complement other initiatives aimed at reducing the number of such incidents.

The Agency is continuing with initiatives to tackle the number of incidents from this sector in order to improve the industry's environmental performance. It has worked closely with the Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) on a number of projects to reduce pollution, minimise waste and to promote sustainable construction, and is represented on the Construction Industry Environmental Forum (CIEF) which is sponsored by my Department. The Agency has also produced specific information and guidance to raise awareness of environmental issues amongst construction and demolition workers.

A breakdown by industry of substantiated water pollution incidents reported by the Environment Agency is attached for 1995–1997. Figures prior to this are not comparable as data collection methods have changed.

Breakdown of substantiated industrial water pollution incidents 1995–97

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
Construction	807	509	588
Food Industry	398	404	359
Engineering	327	392	357
Mining	312	293	268
Chemical Industry	422	327	238
Textile Industry	224	130	148
Metal Industry	99	118	135
Fuelling Stations	186	64	124
Landfill/Water disposal	251	234	122
Paper Industry	155	110	77
Power Generation	117	305	70
Oil Industry	130	86	66
Demolition	50	209	31
Unclassified	1,285	844	1,140
Total industrial incidents	4,763	4,025	3,723

Source:
Environment Agency

Dioxins (Derbyshire)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make arrangements for the testing of dioxin levels at the site of Avenue Cokeworks, Wingerworth, Derbyshire. [59597]

Mr. Meale: I refer to a statement made by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wellasey (Angela Eagle), on 29 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *129–30*, about the testing of dioxin levels at the site of the former Avenue Cokeworks at Wingerworth in Derbyshire.

The activities at this site, which ceased operation in 1992, were not considered to be significant sources of dioxins. Only background levels of dioxins have been detected in the sludge from tanks where drainage water from the site is collected and no significant dioxin levels have been detected in the sediments of the River Rother upstream of its confluence with the River Doe Lea. The Environment Agency has no plans to initiate new tests for dioxins at the site.

Nuclear Discharges

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what steps he plans to take to return technetium 99 discharges to pre-1994 levels; and if he will make a statement; [59919]

(2) pursuant to the statement by the Environment Agency of October in relation to the commissioning of the mixed oxide fuel plant at Sellafield, what plans he has to reconsider and extend the remit currently available to the Environment Agency; [59920]

(3) what action he is taking to direct the Environment Agency to reassess the fundamental justification for licensing the mox plant in the light of environmental and safety issues; [59921]

(4) what account he intends to take of the international agreement reached at the OSPAR conference in July at Sintra in responding to the Environment Agency's statement relating to liquid discharge limits. [59918]

Mr. Meale: The Agency's proposed decisions were received in my Department on 2 November. Requests have been made to Ministers to call in the applications for their own determination. These requests are being considered carefully and my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will announce their decision as soon as they are able to do so.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in response to the statement by the Environment Agency on 23 October relating to the Sellafield MOX plant and variations to BNFL's site discharge authorisations. [59917]

Mr. Meale: In response to the statement by the Environment Agency on 23 October, 4 letters relating to the Sellafield MOX plant and 2 letters relating to the variations to BNFL's site discharge authorisations have been received.

Sellafield

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Trade Secretary in respect of environmental considerations applying to the terms of reference of the recently commissioned KPMG report exploring future options for Sellafield. [59922]

Mr. Meale: None, but KPMG have met my officials to discuss various aspects of their review for the Government of the options for BNFL's future.

Ancient Woodland

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to direct English Nature to revise its criteria for inclusion on the inventory of ancient woodland to cover smaller woods; and if he will make a statement. [59923]

Mr. Meale: There are practical difficulties associated with extending the scope of the inventory, which already identifies ancient woodland of higher than average value for wildlife in England.

Unimproved Grassland

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to require English Nature to compile inventories of unimproved grassland; and if he will make a statement. [59924]

Mr. Meale: English Nature completed a programme of compiling inventories of lowland semi-natural grassland for all English counties in 1997. English Nature intend to update these periodically.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

World Heritage Sites

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Government are doing to ensure that natural World Heritage sites are represented in the list of new tentative sites that will be put forward to UNESCO. [59374]

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will carefully consider the responses to the recent Consultation Paper, which included suggested natural sites to be included in a new Tentative List of potential UK World Heritage Sites, before reaching a final decision on which natural heritage sites should be included.

After-school Clubs

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much of the money which the New Opportunities Fund will receive during the licence period to September 2001 will be allocated to providing children with sporting opportunities at after-school clubs. [59936]

Mr. Chris Smith: The New Opportunities Fund will commit £400 million to out of school hours activities during the current licence period to September 2001. Within this, £180 million will be committed to education activities, £200 million to childcare, and £20 million to integrated projects combining both childcare and education.

Out of school hours education projects should involve at least half of all secondary schools, at least a quarter of all primary schools, and at least half of all special schools by 2001. Out of school childcare projects should provide childcare places catering for 865,000 children by 2003.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently announced an extra £400 million for the New Opportunities Fund between now and 2001. We are consulting on how this money should be spent and propose that part of the additional amount should be committed to an expansion of the existing out of school hours initiative, to enhance the contribution made by summer schools not only to literacy, numeracy and opportunities for arts, but also to sport.

No specific amount has been earmarked for providing children with sporting opportunities at after-school clubs, but activities offered may include sporting and outdoor learning activities, and structured, learning-oriented play. The amount allocated for sport will be determined by the New Opportunities Fund in response to the applications received.

Terrestrial Television

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the coverage of terrestrial television services throughout the United Kingdom is planned. [60233]

Janet Anderson: The BBC and Independent Television Commission (ITC) are jointly responsible for arrangements for the transmission of terrestrial televisions services across the UK under the terms of the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996 and the Royal Charter and the Government's Agreement with the BBC. This includes planning coverage of BBC and commercial television services in accordance with general Government directions on the use of the television broadcasting spectrum. I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of the Government's guidance note to the BBC and ITC on the use of spectrum between 470 and 854 MHz which has been assigned to television broadcasting.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the registers held by her Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59739]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development does not hold any registers which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what childcare provision is made available by her Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59729]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development provides holiday playschemes at both Headquarters sites.

The site in East Kilbride operates under a three-way partnership made up of DFID, Inland Revenue and Scottish Nuclear. The site in London is part of the Whitehall Holiday Playscheme, run by the Cabinet Office at three sites in central London and open to a large proportion of Government Departments.

The figures requested are as follows:

	East Kilbride	*London*
Cost to parents	£10 annual registration fee per family £7.00 per child per day	£16.11 per child per day paid by DFID of which £8.05 per child is paid by the parent
Number of parents using the facilities:		
1996–97	19	20
1997–98	15	17
Proportion of total staff in DFID using facilities:		
1996–97	3.8%	3%
1997–98	3.3%	2.8%

Providing access to the holiday playschemes is only one of a range of family friendly policies that are available to staff. Other benefits include paid maternity leave at full pay, paternity leave, extended career breaks (up to a maximum of five years) and special leave for domestic emergencies. To help staff balance work and family life, they are also able to apply to work part-time or flexible hours, to job-share or to work from home.

Vocational Educational Training

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the importance of vocational educational training in eradicating poverty; and if she will make a statement. [59876]

Mr. Foulkes: This Department has in the past carried out a number of reviews of training, much of which has been of an academic or technical nature. Vocational educational training has been shown to contribute best to poverty eradication when it is closely targeted on the needs of poor individuals and related to the conditions in which they are living. We are in the process of designing a 'Skills for Development' programme which will address the needs in developing countries for a variety of skills including policy level, management, technical and livelihood skills.

Work currently under way includes a project in India which will investigate and provide for the skills needs of poor people to improve their employability in local industries and enterprises, via a non-formal community college whose work is firmly rooted in the local context. The project incorporates a management partnership between Bilston College in Staffordshire and the Community College in Madras. We intend that this initiative will be assessed for its impact on poverty and growth in the local economy.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what departmental resources are currently allocated to vocational educational training programmes; and if she will provide details of the programmes. [59877]

Mr. Foulkes: The information requested is not readily available. I will reply by Monday 23 November with the information requested, and will send a copy to the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Badgers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimates she has made of *(a)* the number of badgers in Northern Ireland, *(b)* the highest and lowest densities per square kilometre and *(c)* the level of tuberculosis in those populations. [59037]

Mr. Paul Murphy: From a survey carried out in 1994 there are estimated to be around 38,000 badgers in Northern Ireland.

Based on the survey the highest density recorded in one area of Northern Ireland was 15 badgers per square kilometre. Other areas had densities as low as 1 or 2 badgers per square kilometre.

Information is not available on the level of tuberculosis in these badger populations.

Down Area Plan

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what work has been undertaken in respect of the review of the Down Area Plan; and what consultations have taken place with *(a)* interested bodies and *(b)* public representatives in respect of the review of the plan. [59537]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Planning Service under its Chief Executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 16 November 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the review of the Down Area Plan.

Work on a new Plan for the Ards and Down District Council areas is programmed in the Planning Service's Corporate and Business Plans 1998–99 to 2000–01 to commence in the 1998–99 business year. While it was originally envisaged that work would commence in the Autumn, unfortunately, there has been some slippage. The Planning Service now intends publishing the statutory notice initiating the Plan early in the New Year, and to make a presentation to, and commence discussions with, both Councils on or about the second week in January 1999.

I do hope this is helpful.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Former Secretary of State for Wales

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if Mr. Alan Steele of Her Majesty's Treasury Solicitors telephoned *The Sun* newspaper on 3 November in connection with the resignation of the former Secretary of State for Wales; [59570]

(2) what instructions were given by the Treasury Solicitor to Mr. Alan Steele to contact newspapers over the resignation of the former Secretary of State for Wales; [59572]

(3) what responsibilities Mr. Alan Steele of the Treasury Solicitor's Office holds for press relations; [59574]

(4) what position Mr. Alan Steele holds in the Treasury Solicitor's Department. [59571]

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on 12 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *293*.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Attorney-General how many applications for legal aid in matrimonial cases were *(a)* made and *(b)* granted in each of the last three years. [59205]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested regarding matrimonial cases is as follows:

Matrimonial proceedings

Year	*Applications received*	*Applications granted*
1995–96	141,352	103,705
1996–97	128,488	91,914
1997–98	120,489	85,808

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if the committee will consider recommending that relevant interests which appear on questions on the Order Paper also appear when answers are printed in the *Official Report*. [59812]

Mrs. Roe: I will put the hon. Gentleman's proposal before my Committee at an early opportunity.

CABINET OFFICE

Special Advisers

Ms Oona King: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the pay of Special Advisers. [60340]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: On coming into office, the Government implemented existing proposals for a pay structure for Special Advisers based on a single undifferentiated pay range (£24,349—£73,484). This arrangement, which made no distinctions based on level of responsibilities or duties and contained a system of performance pay to be determined by Ministers themselves, has proved unrealistic in practice.

I am today placing in the Libraries of the House details of a new pay structure for Special Advisers extending from £26,000 to £76,056 (the scale has been uprated by inflation) but with three bands. This is intended to provide a clear and coherent framework for Special Advisers' pay based on their role and responsibilities, and is based on the salaries of the permanent civil servants alongside whom they work. All Special Advisers will have moved to the new arrangement by 1 December 1998. There will be no performance pay.

The salaries of all Special Advisers as at 1 December 1998 are set out in the following table, in bands of £10,000:

£	*Number of Advisers*
10,001 to 20,000	1
20,001 to 30,000	14
30,001 to 40,000	19
40,001 to 50,000	13
50,001 to 60,000	10
60,001 to 70,000	7
70,001 to 80,000	3
80,001 to 90,000	0
90,001 to 100,000	2
100,001 to 110,000	1

The highest paid Advisers are Keith Hellawell, Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell. Their salaries are outside the new three-band structure. Their salary arrangements will remain unchanged. They received a 2 per cent. increase from 1 April in line with other senior civil servants.

The average salary of Special Advisers under this Government is £45,378, compared with £46,421 under the last Government.

The move to the new arrangements will, for this year, take the place of the pay award for Special Advisers. The arrangements will be brought into place on a staged basis for departmental advisers. For future years, the intention is that the pay bands will be uprated in line with changes to the Senior Civil Service pay bands. In No. 10 there has been a restructuring of the roles and responsibilities of certain members of the Policy Unit and other Special Advisers in the light of the experience of the first year in Government. These new arrangements have been in place since 1 July 1998.

The estimate for the total pay bill for 1998–99 for Special Advisers, taking account of these changes, remains at £3.6 million, the figure given by the Prime Minister on 11 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *664*.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Council if she will make a statement on the progress made by the Government in ensuring that the UK deals with potential millennium bug problems. [59670]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to this House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the libraries of the House and on the Internet.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Council what action the Government have taken to ensure that essential facilities in public services are millennium compliant. [59221]

Mrs. Beckett: The Prime Minister has set up a Ministerial Group, which I chair, supported by a dedicated Year 2000 team in the Cabinet Office, to drive forward action across the private and public sectors to ensure that the delivery of essential public services is not materially disrupted by the failure of electronic systems as a result of the Millennium bug.

The Government have put in place a centralised monitoring programme to review the progress that departments and agencies and key organisations within the wider public sector are making in tackling the bug. All departmental returns are reviewed, and any areas of concern are followed up with the relevant department. The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency provide detailed advice and guidance to departments on tackling the Bug.

We have also set up through Action 2000 a National Infrastructure Forum. The Forum brings together the major providers and users of infrastructure services to share best practice and compliance information. As a key part of the work of the Forum, Action 2000 is leading an Independent Assessment Project to assess the progress made by key service providers in achieving Millennium compliance.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Council what contingency plans the Government have made in respect of problems with essential public services. [59222]

Mrs. Beckett: Legislation provides for contingency plans to be drawn up to deal with civil emergencies in key utilities such as water, gas, and electricity and these arrangements are already in place.

All central government departments and agencies have been asked to have initial year 2000 contingency plans in place by January 1999. Departments will be required to develop and update these plans as their own year 2000 programmes mature and as more information about the compliance of their suppliers and key infrastructure service providers becomes available.

We are also funding Action 2000 to run an Independent Assessment Project to evaluate the Year 2000 readiness efforts of key service providers. This includes assessment of contingency planning.

TREASURY

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department will make all future UK quota increases to the IMF subject to parliamentary approval on the floor of the House. [56525]

Ms Hewitt: Section 1(2) of the International Monetary Fund Act 1979 stipulates that, before the Treasury may make an order increasing the UK's quota, a draft of the Order must be approved by a resolution of the House of Commons.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government are taking to ensure that recipient countries of loans satisfy more stringent disclosure requirements as a condition for further lending; and what are the current disclosure requirements. [56531]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 1998]:* As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his statement to the House on 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 559–74, immediate action to promote transparency in fiscal policy, financial and monetary policy, and corporate governance should be key components in any reform programme which the IMF and the World Bank agree in coming months. The UK's Executive Director will carefully monitor IMF and World Bank programmes in this respect. He and other G7 Executive Directors have issued a joint statement which commits them to work towards greater disclosure in this area.

To promote greater transparency and disclosure of information in the public and private sectors, the Chancellor had previously called for the urgent

development and implementation of internationally agreed codes of good conduct that all countries should adopt and apply, on fiscal policy—which the IMF have now completed—monetary and financial policy, and corporate governance.

The G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors emphasised their support for this approach in their recent statement on strengthening the financial system. They called upon the IMF to publish in a timely and systematic way the results of its surveillance of the degree to which each of its member countries meets internationally recognised codes and standards of transparency and disclosure in the form of a Transparency Report.

The current disclosure requirements are decided on a case by case basis and relate to the performance criteria of each loan.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the report on the Mexican debt crisis written internally within the IMF by Alan Whittome. [56532]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 1998]:* The Chancellor has made clear his view that there should be a general presumption in favour of publishing IMF documents, except where this might compromise confidentiality. Decisions on the publication of Fund documents rest with the IMF Executive Board.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government will propose that the IMF be remitted to engage in market borrowing. [56530]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 1998]:* The Government have no plans to propose that the IMF be remitted to engage in market borrowing.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure greater transparency in respect of the disclosure requirements for countries in receipt of IMF loans. [56533]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 1998]:* In his statement to the Interim Committee of the IMF on 4 October, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, in most cases, there is a strong argument for publishing Letters of Intent thereby making it clear to the public what has been agreed between the authorities and the IMF. At that meeting, IMF Governors endorsed increased IMF transparency, including the broader publication of Letters of Intent. The Chancellor has continued to emphasise the importance of this in his capacity as chairman of the G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. In their recent statement on strengthening financial systems, the G7 reiterated the need for greater transparency in respect of IMF programmes.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that the IMF's accounts make provision for debts in the same manner as private sector institutions. [56529]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 1998]:* The Government believe that the Fund must perform its responsibilities in an open and transparent way that enhances public confidence.

The IMF's financial statements are prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and are certified as representing a true and fair view of the Fund's financial position by an external audit committee. The IMF's Annual Report contains further information on its liquidity position and borrowing.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will request the IMF to commission an independent study of the way they operate in respect of systemic risk in the global financial system. [56521]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor has called on the IMF to develop a formal mechanism for systematic evaluation, involving external input, of the effectiveness of its operations, programmes, policies and procedures.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the public sector financial obligation in each of the next ten years arising from PFI projects signed since 1 May 1997; and in each case what is the margin of error. [58662]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total value of Private Finance Initiative projects signed since 1 May 1997; and estimate their impact on the profile of public sector borrowing in each of the next 10 years indicating the margin of error in his estimates. [58495]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Since 1 May 1997, 61 PFI projects have been signed which will result in total capital investment of £3.8 billion—equal to the investment from projects signed in the previous 5 years (excluding CTRL).

Almost all signed PFI projects are accounted for wholly as service contracts. The capital investment by the private sector supplier has no impact on public sector net borrowing. Future service payments by the public sector score in total current expenditure, which is a factor in the calculation of net borrowing.

One exception is the Ministry of Defence project for accommodation for military personnel at Lossiemouth, part of which will be accounted for as capital expenditure. Current estimates indicate that this will result in £24 million being scored in public sector net borrowing in 1999–2000.

Labour Statistics

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to ensure that the unemployment statistics represent the numbers available for and seeking work. [59313]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Caroline Flint, dated 16 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on unemployment statistics.

The ONS measure of unemployment, derived from the Labour Force Survey, is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed people who are: out of work, want a job, have actively sought work in the previous 4 weeks and are available to start work within the next fortnight or; out of work and

have accepted a job which they are waiting to start in the next fortnight. The ILO methodology has been in use since 1984, and since April 1998 ILO unemployment estimates have been published every month.

ILO unemployment, as measured by the LFS, has high sampling variability for areas below regional level and quarterly unemployment data is only published for larger local authorities. There is an annual Local Area Database (LAD) which, by combining four quarter's samples, provides more robust estimates down to Local Authority/Unitary Authority level. However, the estimates of ILO unemployment for many LAs/UAs are still below the ONS publication threshold of 6,000 for annual averages.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count. The claimant count records the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits. These are currently the Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) and National Insurance credits, claimed at Employment Service local offices. People claiming JSA must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which the claim is made. They enter into a Jobseeker's agreement setting out the action they will take to find work and to improve their prospects of finding employment.

The claimant count is accurate down to very small geographic areas, such as postcode sectors and wards, from which aggregations such as Parliamentary Constituencies can be made. It is unaffected by sampling variability since it is a 100 per cent count.

ONS is currently investigating improving both the range of labour market indicators available at a local level and the range of geographies for which they are available.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Don Valley constituency have *(a)* retired from work, *(b)* taken voluntary redundancy and *(c)* been made compulsorily redundant for the most recent 12 month period for which figures are available; and what these figures represent as a proportion of the workforce. [59310]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Caroline Flint, dated November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on people in the Don Valley constituency who have been made redundant or retired from employment.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the ONS's major source of labour market data on individuals including redundancies. It can provide information on why people who are not in employment left their last job (although voluntary and compulsory redundancy are not separately identified). Such analyses can be restricted to people who have left their last job within the last 12 months. However, no LFS data is available at constituency level and no data below county level is available for such analyses. As with any sample survey the LFS is subject to sampling variability and even for South Yorkshire such an analysis will not yield reliable estimates. Unfortunately, no other source can provide the information requested either.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of new jobs in Doncaster Borough, broken down by sector, in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [59312]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Caroline Flint, dated 16 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the number of new jobs in the Doncaster Borough.

Statistics for employee jobs in Doncaster Local Authority District by broad industry group are available from the ONS Annual Employment Survey (AES). The latest results are for September 1996, which can be compared with September 1995. You can access this information in the House of Commons Library through the NOMIS database.

The figures for September 1997 are planned to be available from NOMIS from May 1999.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of revenues from stamp duty in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 is attributable to intellectual property transactions. [59299]

Ms Hewitt: Total receipts from stamp duty (including stamp duty reserve tax) in 1997–98, the latest available year, were £3,455 million. It is estimated that stamp duty on transactions of intellectual property amounted to around £5 million.

Pension Mis-selling

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the notifications he has *(a)* received and *(b)* approved of transfers of funds from life fund surpluses to compensate victims of pension mis-selling, indicating the insurance company and amounts concerned. [59449]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have looked very carefully at where the costs of compensation should fall, and have settled on a very clear and proper principle: the costs of compensating victims of mis-selling should be shared and borne by those who stand to share in the profit of the company. Hence, the burden is distributed between policyholders and shareholders.

There is no legal requirement for insurance companies either to notify or to receive the prior approval of the Treasury of their intention to use surpluses in life funds to compensate victims of pension mis-selling. Although the Treasury has no direct role in approving the use of funds for this purpose it does have a general duty under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 to ensure that insurance companies are able to meet the reasonable expectations of their policyholders. As the then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), told my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 1 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *94–95*, the Treasury has issued guidance to companies on where the compensation costs of pension mis-selling should fall.

In order to monitor compliance with this guidance, companies were asked in October 1994 to provide Insurance Directorate with information about how the costs were to be attributed. The Directorate has also periodically asked companies to provide details of the compensation they have paid and the provisions they have

made for future compensation claims. However, the information was supplied to the Treasury on a confidential basis and so cannot be made publicly available on an individual company basis. The table provides aggregated information about how the costs are being attributed by proprietary companies.

Attribution of compensation costs in the case of proprietary companies

Source of funds within the company	*Number of companies*	*Compensation paid up to 31 March 1998 (£ million)*	*Provisions held for future compensation costs (£ million)*
Long term fund (non-profit)	37	310	1,600
Long term fund (with-profit)	20	1,480	3,100
Long term fund (mixture of non-profit and with-profit)	6	50	320
Shareholder funds	4	15	75
Mixture of shareholder funds and long term fund	3	15	35
Indemnities	3	50	230
Total	73	1,920	5,360

Clearly, in the case of a mutual company, there is no alternative but for policyholder funds to be used to meet the costs of compensation. 16 mutual life offices had paid some £250 million of compensation up to March 1998 and had made further provisions of a total of some £800 million.

Government Debt (Euros)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to redenominate sterling debt in euros. [59520]

Ms Hewitt: If the UK joins the single currency, the Government would expect to redenominate sterling debt soon after Stage 3 entry. Detailed decisions would have to be taken nearer the time.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of Government debt is denominated in euros; and what estimate he has made of how this will change in the next three years. [59521]

Ms Hewitt: At the end of March 1998, 0.1 per cent. of central government gross debt was denominated in Euro. There was also 1.6 per cent. of ecu debt. Ecu debt will automatically be re-denominated into Euro at the start of 1999.

ERM 2

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how long sterling has unofficially remained within the fluctuation bands permitted under ERM 2; and if he will make a statement. [59791]

Ms Hewitt: The UK is not a member of ERM 2 and the Government have no intention of joining. The Government do not have a target for sterling but aim for a stable and competitive exchange rate over the medium term, consistent with the objective of price stability.

National Health Service (50th Anniversary)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of producing the 50 pence piece commemorating the 50th anniversary of the National Health Service. [59792]

Ms Hewitt: The manufacturing costs of individual coins are commercially confidential.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the monthly value of the real sterling effective trade-weighted exchange rate for each month since September 1992. [59418]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* Monthly estimates of the UK's real effective exchange rate are published by the OECD each month in 'Main Economic Indicators'.

Export Growth Forecasts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions on the future level of the value of the pound have been made in the pre-Budget report, November 1998, in order to derive forecasts for the growth of UK exports over the period from 1999 to 2002; and if he will make a statement. [59416]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* As stated in the Pre-Budget Report, the Treasury's latest forecast assumes that the sterling exchange rate moves in line with an uncovered interest parity condition, consistent with the interest rates underlying the economic forecast.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the direct effect on UK GDP growth in 1998 compared with 1997 of the slowdown in the rate of growth of UK export markets; and if he will make a statement. [59420]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Pre-Budget Report forecast published on 3 November shows UK export market growth slowing from 10½ per cent. in 1997 to 7¼ per cent. in 1998. On its own, this would have tended to reduce GDP growth between 1997 and 1998 by around 1 percentage point, before allowing for knock-on effects on domestic demand. The Pre-Budget Report forecast for GDP growth takes full account of all other relevant factors.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the proportion of the slowdown in export growth from the 1997 level attributable to *(a)* decline in UK export market growth and *(b)* decline in competitiveness, for each of the years (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001. [59417]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The major part of the forecast deceleration in UK exports of goods and services between 1997 and 1999 can be

accounted for by deceleration in UK export markets growth. After 1999, growth of UK export markets is forecast to pick up. Relevant figures are set out in the Pre-Budget Report published on 3 November.

Tax System

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what policies he is pursuing to simplify the tax system; and if he will make a statement. [59434]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Government are committed to simplifying the tax system where practicable to do so.

Motor Vehicle Imports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations his Department has received on the cost to the Exchequer in lost revenue from the parallel import of motor vehicles from the Republic of Ireland to the UK; and what evaluation he has made of them. [59464]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* Customs are not aware of any representations made on the cost to the Exchequer of lost revenue from the parallel import of motor vehicles from the Republic of Ireland to the UK.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the number of firms whose liability to pass on income tax and NICs collected from their employees is likely to be less than their liability to pay working families tax credit to their employees. [59450]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Government's intention is that any employers who can show that the income tax and NICs which they collect will not be sufficient to pay working families' tax credit to their employees will be able to obtain funding from the Inland Revenue. Reliable estimates of the number of firms which might be involved are not available at this stage.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he held with Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the proposals contained in the Transport White Paper prior to his recent announcement of changes in Vehicle Excise Duty rates. [59508]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* As usual, all Government Departments with an interest worked together closely in developing the documents to which the hon. Member refers.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he made prior to the announcement of his decision of Vehicle Excise Duty rates of the relative merits of diesel cars in respect of *(a)* fuel efficiency and *(b)* pollution generation. [59518]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The consultation document published on 3 November sets out the options for the reform of Vehicle Excise Duty (VED). VED will, as usual, be considered at the time of the next Budget.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if changes to Vehicle Excise Duty will be revenue-neutral. [59507]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* Decisions on Vehicle Excise Duty rates will, as usual, be announced at the time of the next Budget.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost to the Treasury of the £50 reduction in Vehicle Excise Duty for smaller cars and *(b)* the additional revenue that will be raised for the Treasury from increasing Vehicle Excise Duty on (i) larger cars, (ii) company cars, and (iii) LGVs in the course of a full financial year. [59506]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The consultation document published on 3 November sets out options for vehicle excise duty reform. The revenue implications will depend on the details of the option chosen.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he will take to ensure that motorists living in rural areas are not disproportionately affected by changes to Vehicle Excise Duty. [59505]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Government recognise that for some, especially those living in rural areas, car ownership can be a necessity. The consultation document published on 3 November sets out options for vehicle excise duty reform. A reduction in VED of £50 for the cleanest cars will, as a result of these reforms, be available to everyone, including those living in rural areas.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will introduce changes to Vehicle Excise Duty rates to take account of the inefficiency of aging vehicles; [59494]

(2) what measures he proposes to ensure that the use of car age as an emissions proxy for the purpose of setting Vehicle Excise Duty rates does not disproportionately affect lower income groups. [59503]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The options for a new system of vehicle excise duty are set out in the consultation document that was published on 3 November.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Department provided the officials who prepared the initial drafts of the chapter on The Productivity Challenge in the November 1998 Pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [59733]

Ms Hewitt: Chapter 3 of the Pre-Budget Report, like the rest of the document, was drafted by my officials in consultation with other departments where appropriate.

Treasury Employees (New Deal)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people who have been on the New Deal have been employed subsequently by Her Majesty's Treasury; and if he will make a statement. [59624]

Ms Hewitt: The department has recruited one person from the New Deal Gateway into an unsubsidised job, working in the Welfare to Work Team.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59724]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury participates in the Westminster Holiday Playscheme which provides childcare during school holidays for children between the ages of five and twelve. The cost to parents is currently £6.50 for each place booked.

The number of parents using the Playscheme facility on at least one occasion was 23 in the financial year 1996–97 and 22 in the financial year 1997–98. This represents 3 and 2 per cent. of total staff respectively.

Credit Unions

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to encourage credit unions to develop; and if he will make a statement. [60341]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury published a consultation document today with proposals to ease some of the current restrictions on credit unions, designed to encourage their growth whilst maintaining their traditional focus on the lower paid. The document also seeks views on the appropriate form of regulation when responsibility for it transfers from the Registry of Friendly Societies to the Financial Services Authority. Copies of the document have been placed in Libraries of the House

Petrol Smuggling

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations his Department has received on the cost to the Exchequer in lost revenue of the resale of petrol imported into the UK via the Republic of Ireland; [59465]

(2) what representations his Department has received on the cost to the Exchequer in lost revenue by petrol smuggling from the Republic of Ireland; and what evaluation he has made of them. [59463]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Chancellor has not received any representations specifically about smuggling of petrol from the Republic of Ireland into the UK. However, he has received representations about the level of smuggling of diesel from the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland.

HM Customs and Excise have no official estimates for the revenue lost to the Exchequer through such activity.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59736]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 30 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *177*.

EU Council Recommendation 11393/97

Mr. Benn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the European Union Council Recommendation 11393/97, issued in Brussels on 28 October 1997. [59596]

Ms Hewitt: The European union Council Recommendation 11393/97 was sent, along with an explanatory memorandum, to the European Legislation Committee of the House of Commons and the Select Committee on the European Communities of the House of Lords on 17 November 1997. The document was deposited in the Houses of Parliament on 18 November 1997.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *198*, and paragraph 2 of Cm 4076, what assessment he has made of the impact of gross domestic product growth below his Department's most pessimistic case on compliance with the golden rule. [60044]

Ms Hewitt: Paragraph 2.56 of the Pre-Budget Report published on 3 November 1998 explains that the fiscal rules apply over the economic cycle and that they are robust to errors in short-term growth forecasts. On the basis of the Government's prudent approach to the public finances, the golden rule will be met on average over the cycle.

Dorneywood

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which members of *(a)* Her Majesty's Treasury and *(b)* other Government departments have made use of Dorneywood since 1 May 1997; on how many occasions and for what purposes in each case; and if he will make a statement. [59626]

Ms Hewitt: I refer to the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 10 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *132*.

Tax Relief (Seconded Staff)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of people each year who would benefit from tax relief on the salaries of staff seconded from business to educational establishments; and if he will make a statement. [59734]

Dawn Primarolo: No information is available about the number of businesses that will benefit from the proposal announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 27 October for a tax relief for a business which seconds an employee to educational establishments.

Liquor Duties (Harmonisation)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the harmonisation of liquor duties with other EU countries. [59830]

Dawn Primarolo: Member States are free to set excise duty rates at the levels they feel are appropriate to their own particular circumstances, subject only to the agreed minimum rates. The Government believe that there should be a levelling up of the minimum rates of excise duty on beer and wine but recognise that progress is likely to be in the long term. The mechanism for achieving this aim is through the European Commission's biennial reviews of the minimum rates of excise duties. The Commission's report on alcohol minimum rates, due by 31 December 1996, is awaited.

Progressive Beer Duty

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from small brewers concerning the introduction of progressive beer duty; and if he will make a statement. [59896]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received representations about progressive beer duty from the Independent Family Brewers of Britain and the Society of Independent Brewers. I have asked Customs and Excise to review the case for progressive beer duty and they will provide me with advice in due course.

Social Security Expenditure

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will restate the Social Security Benefits expenditure from 1998–99 to 2001–02 in Table B12 of the pre-Budget report on the basis of unemployment at the April 1998 level. [59096]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* I have been asked to reply.

The estimated effects on Social Security benefits would be increases in expenditure of:

£ million

Year	*Amount*
1998–99	150
1999–2000	240
2000–01	250
2001–02	260

Note:
These figures are consistent with the Social Security forecasts published in table B12 of the Pre-Budget Report but exclude figures for Northern Ireland.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Service Charter

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *159–60*, concerning complaints under the Court Service Charter, what analysis has been carried out of the nature of the complaints upheld; and what administrative or other changes this has led to in the Court Service. [59095]

Mr. Hoon: Where a complaint highlights weaknesses in procedures, changes are made to put these right. Examples of such changes include the introduction of additional checks when registering judgments and new measures to prevent disclosure of confidential information in adoption cases. The Court Service is currently introducing a standardised database to record the number and type of complaints made at its various courts and offices throughout England and Wales.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59741]

Mr. Hoon: There are no registers within the Lord Chancellor's Department that are open to hon. Members but not to the public. For a list of registers open for inspection I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 8 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *520–21*.

Freemasons

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of the judiciary responded to his invitation to disclose membership of the freemasons; how many refused to respond; and how many have not yet responded. [59071]

Mr. Hoon: Following the Government's response to the Report of the Home Affairs Select Committee, Session 1996–97, on Freemasonry in the Police and the Judiciary, all serving members of the judiciary were invited by the Lord Chancellor to declare their Masonic status on a voluntary basis for the purpose of a Register. 5,290 questionnaires were distributed. As at 9 November, 5,033 office-holders had responded; of these, 64 had declined to disclose whether or not they are Freemasons. Replies are still coming in, but this left 257 outstanding.

Court Clerks

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to ensure that unqualified existing court clerks can become qualified as a solicitor or barrister without significant disruption to the work of *(a)* the courts and *(b)* the individuals concerned. [60194]

Mr. Hoon: Professionalisation is an essential part of the plans to modernise the magistrates' courts. It will equip legal advisers to handle new responsibilities and future changes in the legal system. It is important that everyone has confidence in the status and qualification of those advising lay justices.

After careful consideration of the impact on the magistrates courts and individuals, I have decided that those existing court clerks who will be aged 40 or older on 1 January 1999 will not be required to qualify, although they may do so if they wish. A number of training options will be made available to those existing court clerks required to qualify under the new rules. They are all study programmes designed for people engaged in full-time employment and include day release, distance

learning, evening or weekend study. I am asking magistrates' courts committees to give existing court clerks up to one day off for each week of study, or time off in lieu if they do not select a day release option.

The Lord Chancellor's Department will meet the cost of tuition and the required study leave. The Department will also make funds available to meet the costs of care for children or other dependent relatives, such as the disabled and the elderly, where this responsibility would pose a problem for those undergoing training. Reasonable costs of necessary travel and accommodation will also be met. Magistrates' courts committees will be asked to provide details of every individual's training needs so that appropriate training arrangement can be made to meet the needs of the individual and the courts committees as far as possible.

Magistrates Courts Committees

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to make Magistrates' Courts Committees democratically accountable to the local communities they serve. [59081]

Mr. Hoon: Magistrates' Courts Committees (MCCs) are composed of magistrates for the area to which the committee relates, in accordance with Section 28 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997 (JPA). Section 6 of the JPA provides that, with few exceptions, magistrates may be appointed to an area only if they reside within 15 miles of that area. MCCs are therefore overwhelmingly made up of local magistrates.

MCCs are responsible for the efficient and effective administration of magistrates' courts in their area. There is a range of statutory and non-statutory provisions designed to ensure that the needs of court users are taken into account, and that the local community can be involved in the work of the MCC.

Section 30(4) of the JPA allows an MCC to act through sub-committees which, so long as they include at least one member of the MCC, can include non-members.

Section 30(9) of the JPA requires that at least once each calendar year, MCCs must admit members of the public to a meeting.

Section 30(10)—(12) of the JPA requires that minutes of every MCC meeting must be open for public inspection unless deemed confidential. If they are deemed confidential, the MCC must give reasons.

Section 31(6) of the JPA requires MCCs to have regard to the needs of disabled court users.

MCCs are required to submit to periodic independent inspection by Her Majesty's Magistrates' Court Service Inspectorate. The inspection process includes discussions with court users (both professional and non-professional). These discussions inform the Inspectorate's reports on individual MCC areas. The contents of the Inspectorate's report are made available to members of the public through a public information booklet for each area after it is inspected. The booklet contains a digest of the Inspectorate's findings and recommendations and the MCC's response.

New guidance on the production of annual reports was issued to MCCs in October 1998. All MCCs are required to submit annual reports for the financial year 1998–99 onwards, which contain key information. In their annual reports, amongst other things, MCCs will be expected to include information on when they published their first Charter and when that Charter was revised and updated to take account of the new model Charter issued by LCD, and the guidance issued by the Cabinet Office as part of the Service First programme. MCCs will be expected to report on the performance against three key charter standards in the body of the annual report. The setting of clear standards and reporting on how and whether they are achieved is a vital aspect of accountability to court users. The Service First Guidance places a significant emphasis on consulting users.

Communication with the community is demonstrated through MCCs' involvement in the Magistrates' Association's schools project and through Open Days. The Lord Chancellor has written to MCCs emphasising the importance he attaches to Open days and has asked each MCC to provide an annual return on the open days they have held in their areas. Reports submitted for the year to 30 September 1998 show the success of Open days. Consultation with court user groups and the guidance issued by Central Council on courthouse closures provide other examples of non-statutory consultation which enhances accountability.

Complaints provide a further method of non-statutory accountability to the community. Letters and telephone calls to MCC officials and LCD officials, letters to MPs and Ministers all enable the community to influence the operation of the MCC.

PRIME MINISTER

Staff (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin, as at 1 October 1997 of members of *(a)* his private office, *(b)* Government special advisers, *(c)* No. 10 Policy Unit and *(d)* No. 10 Downing Street staff in total. [56841]

The Prime Minister: Information on the ethnic origin of civil servants is collected on a voluntary basis, using confidential questionnaires. The number and percentage of ethnic minority staff in the private office, Government special advisers and No. 10 Policy Unit and for No. 10 Downing Street in total are set out in the table. These figures are for 1 November 1998. We are unable to verify retrospective data for 1 October 1997.

Ethnic origin of No. 10 staff and Government Special Advisers[1]

Department	*Total*	*Ethnic minority*	*Ethnic minority (%)*
All Downing Street staff	145	7	4.8
Private Office	9	0	0
No. 10 Policy Unit	19	[2]—	[2]—
Government Special Advisers	55	0	0

[1] Headcount of staff who responded to survey on ethnic origin
[2] Less than 5 staff
Source:
Departmental Returns

European Union (Information)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to ensure that, in future official publications informing the public about the European Union, lists of recommended sources for further contact include organisations opposed to closer union; and if he will list the criteria for inclusion there. [59810]

The Prime Minister: There are no set criteria concerning contact lists in UK Government publications about the EU. Where lists are given, they should normally include contact points for officials in Government Departments who can provide practical assistance. The lists should also, where appropriate, include relevant outside organisations.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the March meeting of Government press officers on better information in the EU; if he will list the delegates; and if he will place the (i) agenda and (ii) minutes of that meeting in the Library. [59806]

The Prime Minister: The meeting held on 27 March 1998 was an informal seminar to discuss the provision of information abut the EU. There were no minutes and the meeting did not draw conclusions. The General Affairs Council on 29 June, however, adopted Conclusions reflecting discussions at the meeting and subsequent follow-up by the Council. I have placed a copy of the programme, the objectives of the seminar, and a list of participants in the Libraries of both Houses.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on UK policy presentation at Poertschach on the Fourth Pillar; [59787]

(2) if the Government supported integration of the Western European Union into the European Union *(a)* during the course of the Amsterdam Treaty negotiations and *(b)* at Poertschach; and if he will make a statement. [59788]

The Prime Minister: At the Amsterdam European Council in June 1997, EU member states agreed that the Union should foster closer institutional relations with the WEU with a view to the possibility of the integration of the WEU into the Union, if member States agreed unanimously.

The meeting of Heads at Poertschach was an informal meeting in preparation for the full European Council in Vienna, at which a broad range of issues were discussed. No formal decisions were taken.

At the meeting I stressed the need for a stronger European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy underpinned by more defence capabilities. I did not advocate a particular institutional model.

European Union (Policy)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those attending meetings held at *(a)* the Cabinet Office and *(b)* 10 Downing Street, since 1 May 1997, to discuss the Government's approach to the European Union; and what criteria were used to determine who was invited. [59797]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) on 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *32–33*.

Ethical Foreign Policy Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those areas where EU policy has been modified as a result of the UK's ethical foreign policy initiative. [59793]

The Prime Minister: We work closely with our EU partners to promote universal respect for human rights and to achieve real improvements in the lives of ordinary people. For example, under our Presidency the EU agreed a common position on human rights in Africa, strengthened its international work in opposition to the death penalty and established guidelines for international election monitoring. The EU also adopted a Code of Conduct on Arms Sales under our Presidency.

Life Peers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those life peers appointed since 1990 who had been serving in local government prior to their appointment, and the local authorities on which they served. [58526]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* This information is not held centrally. However, I have asked my office to research this information and I will write to my hon. Friend in due course.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the results of UNSCOM's examinations of the presidential palaces in Iraq. [60093]

The Prime Minister: A full report on the UNSCOM/IAEA inspections of Presidential sites in Iraq from 26 March to 4 April was sent by the United Nations Secretary General to Security Council members on 15 April.

The report recorded a superficially co-operative atmosphere, but that the sites had very obviously been extensively cleared before the inspectors entered.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the lines of accountability which apply to UNSCOM. [60089]

The Prime Minister: UNSCOM is directly accountable to the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 364, if he will ask the Iraqi Government for what reasons they require the removal of the UN weapons inspectors. [60091]

The Prime Minister: The Iraqi Government's announcements of 5 August and 31 October clearly state their reasons for withdrawing co-operation from UNSCOM and IAEA, and their conditions for the restoration of co-operation. United Nations Security Resolution 1205, adopted unanimously on 31 October, condemns Iraq's actions as a flagrant violation of its obligations under relevant Security Council Resolutions. What is needed is not further explanation from the Iraqi Government, but full compliance with their obligations.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 364, if he will place in the Library evidence found by the French and Swiss on all aspects of weapons destruction. [60092]

The Prime Minister: A multinational group of experts met on 22–23 October to consider all the results of the analyses of Iraqi missile fragments carried out by laboratories in the US, France and Switzerland. The expert's report concluded that the evidence from the three laboratories conflicted with Iraq's declarations that these warheads had never been filled with any CW agents, including VX. The Executive Chairman of UNSCOM, Richard Butler, submitted the group's report to the President of the United Nations Security Council on 26 October. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

WALES

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56829]

Mr. Michael: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office office on 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *666–70*.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59735]

Mr. Michael: My Department has responsibility for the following public registers which are open to inspection:

Register of Social Landlords

Register of approved voluntary children's homes

Register of medical centres in Wales responsible for the administration of yellow fever vaccine

Register of independent schools in Wales

List of Buildings of Special Architectural Interest

Schedule of Ancient Monuments

Register of Historic Parks and Gardens

Register of Historic Landscapes.

There are no registers open for inspection by hon. Members which cannot be requested by members of the public under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what child care provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this child care; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59731]

Mr. Michael: My Department is a member of a public sector consortium which provides a 60 place nursery. The consortium covers the cost of rent, rates and utilities. Parents are charged at a level intended to cover the costs of running and staffing the nursery. The current fee is £95 per week for a full time place.

Parents also contribute towards the costs of Easter and summer play schemes. This year the charge was £8 per day for the first child and £6 per day for additional children.

Parents usage of facilities

	1996–97		*1997–98*	
	Number	*Percentage of total staff*	*Number*	*Percentage of total staff*
Nursery	46	2.0	44	1.9
Playschemes	49	2.1	55	2.4
Total of both schemes	95	4.1	99	4.3

In addition to these schemes my Department also supports a number of family friendly policies which include paid maternity leave at full pay, career breaks, paternity leave and special leave for domestic emergencies, part time working, jobsharing, flexi time and, homeworking.A review of the Department's Child Care Strategy is currently in progress.

SCOTLAND

Child Minders

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure better supervision and regulation of the arrangements made by commercial organisations which house young foreign students, who are on English language courses or exchanges, in private households in Scotland. [58810]

Mr. Galbraith: The Foster Children (Scotland) Act 1984 already regulates care provided for children under the age of 16 where the person providing or intending to provide the care is not a relative and where he or she proposes to care for a child for 28 days or longer.

As part of our response to the Kent Report on Children's Safeguards Review we have already announced our intention to consult on the introduction of a statutory Consultancy Index in Scotland which will hold information about people unsuitable to work with children and young people.

A Home Office let inter-departmental working group is presently looking at further safeguards to prevent unsuitable persons from working with children in paid or unpaid positions in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We shall consider what more needs to be done in this area in the light of the working group's report.

Adoption

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will commission a research study in Scotland on children adopted from care. [58809]

Mr. Galbraith: The case for a research study will be kept under review as the number of children adopted from care under the new procedures in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 grows. A number of legislative changes, including improvements in the process for adoption from care, were recommended by The Review of Adoption Law in Scotland published in 1993. Those changes were introduced by the 1995 Act and associated regulations and came into effect from April 1997.

Marriage (Special Licences)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were married by special licence in Scotland in each of the last five years. [59023]

Mr. McLeish: Marriage by 'special licence' is not possible in Scotland. The Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 requires a period of 14 days to elapse between the appropriate district registrar receiving from the parties formal Marriage Notices accompanied by birth certificates etc and the registrar issuing the Marriage Schedule, the document without which no marriage ceremony, civil or religious, may lawfully take place. Only in exceptional circumstances, for example terminal illness, can this period of notice be shortened, with the approval of the Registrar General.

Dental Services

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dentists currently treat NHS patients in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [59218]

Mr. Galbraith: At 30 September 1998, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 1,858 principal dentists recorded on Health Board dental lists to provide NHS general dental services. There were also 96 vocational trainees and 62 assistant dentists working to principal dentists. In addition, NHS patients may be treated by the Community Dental Service and the Hospital Dental Service which employed at 30 September 1997 (latest available figures) 278 and 314 dentists respectively.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average cost of NHS treatment per patient in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available. [59217]

Mr. Galbraith: The average cost of NHS treatment per head of population in Scotland in 1996–97 was £504.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59721]

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Office have two work place nurseries in Edinburgh. Subsidised places at holiday playschemes are offered to staff in Edinburgh and Glasgow. These operate during the Easter and summer school holiday periods.

In 1996–97 the cost of a full time nursery place was £63 per week and in 1997–98 the cost was £64.57 per week. In total 51 full-time nursery places are available. The service is provided by a private contractor under contract to The Scottish Office. Details of the number of staff using the service are not held by The Scottish Office.

NHS Hospital Beds

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds were available in National Health Service trust hospitals in each of the last three years *(a)* in total and *(b)* by trust area. [59732]

Mr. Galbraith: The number of average available staffed beds in NHS Trust hospitals for each of the last 3 years is given in the following table.

NHS hospitals[1] in Scotland—average available staffed beds by health board area of treatment and NHS trust/directly managed units: years ending 31 March 1996 to 31 March 1998[3]

Health board area of treatment/NHS trust/DMUs	*Years ending 31 March 1996*	*1997*	*1998*[3]
Scotland	40,555	38,427	36,679
Argyll & Clyde	3,522	3,472	3,527
Argyll & Bute NHS Trust	620	618	616
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	364	352	359
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust	405	391	404
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	1,633	1,628	1,665
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	500	483	482
Ayrshire & Arran	2,408	2,259	2,233
Ayrshire & Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	945	856	809
North Ayrshire & Arran NHS Trust	877	840	862
South Ayrshire & Arran NHS Trust	586	563	562
Borders	797	771	743
Borders Community Health Services NHS Trust	418	392	379
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust	379	379	364
Dumfries & Galloway	1,183	1,105	1,059
Dumfries & Galloway Acute & Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	469	443	445
Dumfries & Galloway Community Health NHS Trust	714	662	614
Fife	2,322	2,191	2,070
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	1,517	1,306	1,100
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	439	424	430
Perth & Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust[2]	—	—	91
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	366	461	450
Forth Valley	2,349	2,260	2,106
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	1,525	1,447	1,305
Falkirk & District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	394	380	377
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	429	434	425
Grampian	4,276	4,107	3,864
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	1,425	1,375	1,332
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	2,414	2,261	2,060
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	437	472	471
Greater Glasgow	8,096	7,592	7,315
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	1,263	1,233	1,201
Greater Glasgow Community & Mental Health Services NHS Trust	2,364	2,116	2,030
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	1,066	974	934
Stobhill NHS Trust	784	690	663
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	918	877	855
The Yorkhill NHS Trust	397	400	382
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	1,303	1,305	1,251
Highland	1,614	1,483	1,479
Caithness & Sutherland NHS Trust	226	221	224
Highland Communities NHS Trust	788	677	669
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	600	585	586

NHS hospitals[1] in Scotland—average available staffed beds by health board area of treatment and NHS trust/directly managed units: years ending 31 March 1996 to 31 March 1998[3]

Health board area of treatment/NHS trust/DMUs	Years ending 31 March 1996	1997	1998[3]
Lanarkshire	3,733	3,645	3,459
Hairmyres & Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	754	668	640
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	1,689	1,799	1,675
Law Hospital NHS Trust	645	600	564
Monklands & Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	645	578	579
Lothian	5,998	5,475	4,931
East & Midlothian NHS Trust	1,090	989	914
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	1,533	1,435	1,362
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	141	133	132
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	1,432	1,193	1,028
West Lothian NHS Trust	990	928	826
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	814	797	669
Orkney	150	153	145
Orkney Health Board Unit	150	153	145
Shetland	136	127	116
Shetland Hospitals & Community Services Unit	136	127	116
Tayside	3,720	3,557	3,374
Angus NHS Trust	774	751	731
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	1,008	991	928
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	1,047	991	975
Perth & Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust[2]	891	825	740
Western Isles	250	232	260
Western Isles Health Unit	250	232	260

[1] Excludes information on NHS beds in joint user contractual hospitals

[2] Perth & Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust provided services in both Tayside and Fife Health Board areas during 1997–98; this table shows the 2 figures for the Trust, one for each Health Board area

[3] Provisional

Skye Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those companies to which the rights to charge and to collect tolls on the Skye Bridge are currently assigned. [59976]

Mr. Macdonald: The Secretary of State has assigned his rights to charge and collect tolls on the Skye Bridge to Skye Bridge Tolls Ltd (now Skye Bridge Ltd), in accordance with the provisions of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Skye Bridge toll order was printed and sold. [59975]

Mr. Macdonald: The Invergarry-Kyle of Lochalsh Trunk Road (A87) Extension (Skye Bridge Crossing) Toll Order 1992 (S.I.1992/1501) is a local order in terms of Regulation 4 of the Statutory Instrument Regulations 1947. As such, it was not required to be printed and sold. The Order was not subject to Parliamentary procedure. It complied fully with the procedures required in terms of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 as applied to the Order by the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has provided Miller Civil Engineering with a certificate demonstrating their lawful entitlement to perform the statutory function of toll collection on the Skye Bridge; and if he will make a statement. [59977]

Mr. Macdonald: No such certificate is necessary. Miller Civil Engineering Ltd, as part of their involvement in operating the Bridge, collect tolls on behalf of Skye Bridge Ltd, to whom the Secretary of State assigned the right to charge and collect tolls.

Mature Students

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will remove the statutory restriction which prevents mature students over the age of 50 years gaining access to student loans on recognised degree courses in Scotland. [59365]

Mrs. Liddell: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced on 8 June this year, we plan to extend eligibility for loans to those students aged 50 to 54 at the start of their courses who plan to return to employment.

This extension will take effect from Autumn 1999. It will apply to students starting courses in 1999–2000 and to students who started courses in 1998–99, except those who are entitled to continue receiving support under the previous arrangements. We are currently considering the arrangements in more detail and will provide full information for students early in 1999.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of mature students over the age of 50 years currently enrolled on courses in Scotland which will lead to a recognised university degree. [59366]

Mrs. Liddell: The latest available information, for 1996–97, is given. This includes students aged 50 or over, at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education Colleges (FECs), who were enrolled on first degree or postgraduate courses in Scotland.

Students aged 50 or over studying first degree or postgraduate degree courses in HEIs and FECs, 1996–97

	Full-time	Part-time	All
First Degree	464	330	794
Postgraduate	199	1,508	1,707
All	663	1,838	2,501

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the initial public expenditure outlay necessary to extend student loans to students over the age of 50 years who are undertaking degree level courses in Scottish colleges and universities. [59367]

Mrs. Liddell: Based on the number of such students in academic year 1996–97, the latest year for which figures are available, the cost of extending eligibility for student loans to all those aged 50 and over studying full-time at first degree level at institutions in Scotland would be in the region of £1.27 million in academic year 1998–99.

While it is unlikely that all these students would take up their entitlement, any such extension would in practice cover a larger group of eligible students who were studying on all full-time higher education courses up to first degree or equivalent level.

Standard Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the maximum available Maintenance Award (or Maintenance Award plus Student Loan Company Ltd Student Loan) in *(a)* 1968, *(b)* 1972, *(c)* 1977, *(d)* 1982, *(e)* 1987, *(f)* 1992 and *(g)* 1997 using 1997 as the reference year. [60009]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is set out in the table.

The figures represent the standard maintenance allowance (SMA) and, where appropriate, the full-year student loan available to an undergraduate student attending a standard length course and living away from the parental home outwith London. No account has been taken of means testing.

The rates used applied in the academic years quoted.

	Actual rate			*Expenditure at 1997 prices*		
Year	*SMA*	*Loan*	*Total*	*SMA*	*Loan*	*Total*
1968–69	360	0	360	3,486	0	3,486
1972–73	445	0	445	3,204	0	3,204
1977–78	1,010	0	1,010	3,504	0	3,504
1982–83	1,595	0	1,595	3,081	0	3,081
1987–88	1,915	0	1,915	2,938	0	2,938
1992–93	2,200	715	2,915	2,493	810	3,303
1997–98	1,685	1,685	3,370	1,685	1,685	3,370

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the *(a)* average and *(b)* most common length of time taken for the Criminal Cases Review Commission to reach a conclusion on a case. [59080]

Mr. Boateng: I understand that since April 1997 the average length of time taken, from receipt of the application, to reach a decision on cases (other than those which the Commission has determined do not meet the eligibility criteria laid down by the Criminal Appeal Act 1995) was 193 working days. The most common length of time taken was equally 182 working days and 256 working days (the same number of cases took each period).

Prisoners (Educational Attainment)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of educational attainment of inmates for the *(a)* Hatfield Young Offenders Institute, *(b)* HMP Lindholme and *(c)* HMP Moorlands at the time of admission; and what proportion of inmates were unemployed at the time of conviction. [59302]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is not available, as it could be obtained only by examining each prisoner's record at the three establishments.

Immigration

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers, by nationality, were refused leave to enter the United Kingdom and were detained overnight or longer, in each of the last five years. [59340]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The figures for 1993–97 are given in the table.

Passengers refused leave to enter the United Kingdom and detained overnight or longer, by region and nationality, 1993–97

Geographical region and nationality	*Year of detention*				
	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
European Economic Area[1]					
Austria	[7]—	[6]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—
Belgium	[7]—	10	[6]—	[7]—	10
Denmark	[7]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Finland	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
France	40	30	[7]—	[7]—	10
Germany	[6]—	10	[7]—	[7]—	10
Greece	[7]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Iceland	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Italy	[7]—	30	[7]—	[6]—	10
Liechtenstein	[5]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Luxembourg	[6]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Netherlands	10	40	10	10	10
Norway	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[7]—	[6]—
Portugal	20	30	[6]—	[7]—	10
Spain	[6]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[7]—
Sweden	10	10	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Other Europe					
Bulgaria	10	30	60	40	110
Cyprus	50	340	200	280	290
Czechoslovak Passport Holders	30	30	10	10	10
Czech Republic	[5]—	10	30	50	190
Slovakia	[5]—	10	30	80	260
Hungary	20	10	20	20	40
Malta	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Poland	140	160	270	360	320
Romania	80	100	110	110	160
USSR Passport Holders	30	[7]—	10	[7]—	[7]—
Russia	[5]—	30	50	50	40
Other former USSR	[5]—	60	140	440	400
Switzerland	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Turkey	190	280	210	350	280
Yugoslav Passport Holders	60	50	120	120	320
Bosnia	[5]—	[7]—	[7]—	20	10
Croatia	[5]—	20	20	20	50
Slovenia	[5]—	10	10	10	20
Other former Yugoslavia	[5]—	10	10	10	[7]—
Other Europe	[5]—	40	40	40	140
Americas					
Argentina	10	10	10	[7]—	10
Barbados	10	10	20	10	10
Brazil	70	60	60	100	90
Canada	30	20	30	40	40
Chile	[7]—	10	[7]—	[7]—	10
Colombia	140	170	180	270	300
Guyana	20	20	30	20	10
Jamaica	190	270	350	470	600
Mexico	10	20	10	20	20
Peru	30	30	40	40	10
Trinidad and Tobago	10	30	10	30	30
USA	70	100	80	80	90
Venezuela	10	10	10	20	20
Other Americas	[5]—	140	230	270	290
Africa					
Algeria	130	200	250	230	280
Angola	60	70	50	100	100
Congo (Dem. Rep.)[2]	140	160	120	210	160
Egypt	[7]—	10	10	10	10
Ethiopia	70	60	20	30	20
Ghana	420	640	360	300	240
Kenya	150	170	180	120	170
Libya	40	20	20	[7]—	20
Mauritius	30	30	30	20	10
Morocco	20	40	20	30	50

Passengers refused leave to enter the United Kingdom and detained overnight or longer, by region and nationality, 1993–97

Geographical region and nationality	*Year of detention*				
	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Nigeria	580	1,060	920	610	630
Sierra Leone	210	280	40	60	70
Somalia	150	100	110	120	170
South Africa	60	80	80	80	100
Sudan	10	30	20	40	30
Tanzania	70	80	100	30	60
Tunisia	10	20	[7]—	20	10
Uganda	50	40	40	40	60
Zambia	20	20	40	20	10
Zimbabwe	10	30	30	70	60
Other Africa	[5]—	580	560	410	280
Indian sub-continent					
Bangladesh	120	150	140	100	80
India	140	310	200	220	230
Pakistan	140	260	220	270	420
Middle East					
Iran	30	30	50	80	80
Iraq	40	40	50	80	60
Israel	10	20	20	50	40
Jordan	[7]—	10	[7]—	[7]—	10
Kuwait	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[7]—	[7]—
Lebanon	20	10	20	20	40
Saudi Arabia	10	[6]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Syria	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	10	20
Yemen	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Other Middle East	[5]—	[7]—	10	10	30
Remainder of Asia					
China	80	100	300	150	190
Hong Kong BDTC[3]	20	10	10	[7]—	10
Hong Kong stateless	20	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[7]—
Indonesia	[7]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[7]—
Japan	10	30	10	10	10
Malaysia	70	30	80	110	70
Philippines	10	20	10	10	10
Singapore	10	10	10	10	10
South Korea	10	10	20	10	10
Sri Lanka	180	260	130	150	140
Taiwan	[5]—	[6]—	[7]—	[7]—	[6]—
Thailand	[6]—	10	[6]—	[7]—	[7]—
Other Asia	[5]—	50	50	90	110
Oceania					
Australia	10	10	20	20	20
New Zealand	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	10
Other Oceania	[5]—	[7]—	[7]—	[6]—	[7]—
British Overseas citizens	30	20	10	20	30
Stateless[4]	360	550	680	830	820
Other countries not elsewhere specified	730	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
All nationalities	5,570	7,940	7,480	8,220	9,240

[1] Includes all current EEA countries throughout the period covered
[2] The Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly known as Zaire
[3] British Dependent Territories Citizens
[4] Stateless not elsewhere specified
[5] Not available
[6] Nil
[7] Negligible (i.e. 5 or fewer)

Note:

The figures in this table have been rounded to the nearest 10; because of this the sum of the constituent items may not agree with the total as shown.

Correspondence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter sent to him on 8 September by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East regarding the case of Mr. Farooq Khalid Malik; and what inquiries he has made on the case since receipt of that letter. [59300]

Mr. Boateng: I received this and subsequent letters of 17 September and 20 October and replied to the hon. Member on 5 November answering the points raised.

Former Secretary of State for Wales

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he or his officials passed on to the Prime Minister or his officials all or part of the information received from the Metropolitan police before 11 a.m. on Tuesday 27 October 1998 regarding the right hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies); [59387]

(2) what briefing he or his officials received from the Metropolitan police before 11 a.m. on Tuesday 27 October 1998 regarding the right hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies); and what was the nature of the information passed to him on the that day. [59385]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *120–21*.

Identity Parades

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of two-way mirror identity parade facilities at police stations. [59408]

Mr. Boateng: The Government believe that the provision of two-way screens for identity parades at police stations is helpful. Such screens serve to protect and reassure witnesses who may be anxious about being seen by the person suspected of committing the offence.

The conduct of identification parades is regulated by the Code of Practice for the Identification of Persons by Police Officers (Code D) issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. This provides that an identification parade may take place either in a normal room or in one equipped with a screen permitting witnesses to see members of the parade without being seen.

The provision of facilities for the conduct of identification parades is a matter for chief officers. Figures are not collated centrally on the number of police stations equipped with such screens, or on those having purpose-built identification suites.

Colchester Young Offenders Institute

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the research carried out by Dr. Kate Painter into the experimental regime at Colchester young offenders institution to be published. [59407]

Mr. George Howarth: It is intended to publish the full results of the evaluation of the young offender regime at Colchester Military Corrective Training Centre at the end of 1999, when one-year reconviction data will be available. This will include the qualitative material gathered by Dr. Painter.

Medway Secure Training Centre

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place to ensure that young offenders at Medway Secure Training Centre receive a school placement on completion of the custodial part of their sentence. [59406]

Mr. Boateng: Individually tailored training plans include an education programme and are drawn up jointly by the trainee's key worker at the Secure Training Centre and the supervising officer from the home area. The supervising officer provides continuity throughout the sentence and helps ensure, as far as is practicable, that arrangements are in place for the trainee to return to full time education on release.

Staff at the Secure Training Centre are encouraged to contact relevant Educational Welfare Officers to discuss trainees' training plans and to contact Chief Education Officers at the beginning and end of the period in custody.

Young Offenders (Prisons)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which adult prisons were used for the remand of people aged 17 to 20 years on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest date for which such information is available; [59403]

(2) how many people aged 17 to 20 years were held on remand in adult prisons on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest date for which such information is available. [59402]

Mr. George Howarth: The available information relates to the remand population on the last day of the month and is given in the table.

Population of 17 and 20 year olds on remand in adult prisons in England and Wales on 30 April 1997 and 30 September 1998, by establishment

Prison Service establishment	30 April 1997	[1]30 September 1998
Altcourse	—	91
Belmarsh	2	1
Brockhill	8	9
Bristol	—	2
Birmingham	2	—
Chelmsford	41	51
Cardiff	69	53
Camp Hill	1	—
Durham	1	2
Doncaster	311	266
Dorchester	19	29
Elmley	—	1
Eastwood Park	10	10
Exeter	52	49
Gloucester	79	95
Hull	64	52
Holloway	48	31
Low Newton	136	94
Lewis	51	61
Manchester	1	2
New Hall	21	19
Norwich	36	23
Nottingham	—	121
Parc	—	33
Pentonville	1	—
Rochester	73	45
Risley	23	21
Styal	—	1
Swansea	37	33
Winchester	1	—
Woodhill	55	63
Wandsworth	—	2
Total	1,142	1,260

[1] Provisional figures

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15 and 16 year olds were held on remand in prison service accommodation other than adult prisons on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest date for which such information is available. [59401]

Mr. George Howarth: The available information relates to the remand population on the last day of the month and is given in the table.

Population of 15 and 16 year olds on remand in prisons in England and Wales held in accommodation dedicated to young offenders

	Number
30 April 1997	190
30 September 1998[1]	154

[1] Provisional figures

Durham Prison

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Governor of HMP Durham as to *(a)* how many prisoners have recently been removed from the protection of Rule 43, *(b)* on what authority this has been done and *(c)* how many of those removed from Rule 43 have since been assaulted; and if he will make a statement. [59386]

Mr. George Howarth: As part of the governor's policy of seeking to integrate 'vulnerable' prisoners within the mainstream prisoner population, 75 Rule 43 prisoners at Durham prison were transferred from the former vulnerable prisoner unit to A wing during the week commencing 12 October 1998. This wing accommodates normal location prisoners, many of whom have earned 'enhanced' regime status by their behaviour and conduct in prison. None of the prisoners transferred were signed off Rule 43 protection.

This transfer was undertaken under the authority of the governor, with the aim of providing an improved prison regime for both vulnerable and normal location prisoners.

Staffing levels and the regime on A wing are designed to provide Rule 43 prisoners with the support they need to integrate successfully.

There have been four alleged assaults involving Rule 43 prisoners since the transfer took place, although one of these is believed to have been an incident of self harm.

Greater Manchester Police

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the resources available to Greater Manchester police for 1999–2000. [59388]

Mr. Boateng: On 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 915, my right hon. Friend announced that the police service in England and Wales would receive an additional £1.24 billion over three years from 1999–2000. Our plans allow for police expenditure to increase by 2.65 per cent. next year. No final decisions have been taken about the allocation of funding to individual police authorities for 1999–2000. Funding will be allocated by means of a needs based formula. We expect to announce provisional allocations towards the end of the year.

West Yorkshire Police

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information was obtained by unauthorised persons gaining access to the West Yorkshire police internal communications system; and what assessment he has made of the current security of the system. [59381]

Mr. Boateng: I understand that an individual has been charged with offences in relation to this matter under section 1 of the Computer Misuse Act 1990, and it would not, therefore, be appropriate for me to comment further.

Probation Hostels

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for market testing of probation hostels; and if he will make a statement. [59555]

Mr. George Howarth: I am grateful to the North East London Probation Service for agreeing to test whether an independent sector partner could run the Westbourne House approved hostel to at least the same standard as under the present arrangements at lower cost, although this will stop short of offering a contract for the hostel's operation to open tender. No decision on next steps, either at Westbourne House or more generally, will be taken until the outcome has been considered.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive and report on the review of the Animals Procedures Committee into the workings of the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [59782]

Mr. George Howarth: I understand that the Animal Procedures Committee met on 11 November to complete a further report on its review of the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and I hope to receive that report shortly. I expect it to be laid before Parliament within the next month as an appendix to the Committee's annual report.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59742]

Mr. Straw: The following registers are available for inspection by hon. Members and members of the public:

Register of Forensic Pathologists

Official Roll of the Baronetage

Electoral Registers (Representation of the People Act 1983)[1]

Registers of Burials (and records of disinternments) (Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977)[1]

Registers of Grants (Local Authorities' Cemeteries Orders 1977)[1]

Data Protection Register[2]

Coroners' Registers of Deaths Reported (Coroners' Rules 1984)[1,3]

Registers of Cremations (Cremation Regulations 1930)[1,3].

[1] The Home Office has limited responsibility, by virtue of our supervision of the relevant local services and/or the governing legislation.

[2] Held by the Data Protection Registrar—a Home Office Non-Departmental Public Body

[3] Access is subject to the approval of the authority holding the register.

Speed Fines

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to allow local authorities to keep fines received from prosecutions as a result of speed cameras. [59672]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no current plans to allow local authorities, the police or the courts to retain fines from prosecutions for speeding offences detected by camera, but we are reviewing the funding arrangements for the cameras to see what more can be done.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if road traffic accidents and motoring offences will be included in the Crime and Disorder Audit. [59677]

Mr. Boateng: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 lays a duty on the local authority and police in every area, in partnership with a wide range of other bodies, to carry out a full audit of the levels and patterns of crime and disorder in that area and then, based upon the findings of the audit and consultation with the community about them, to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder. The Act does not specify what categories of crime and disorder must be included in the audit and strategy; this is a matter for decision locally.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59725]

Mr. Straw: Provision is made for spending up to £380,000 on subsidised childcare in the current financial year for Home Office staff (including the Agencies) at various locations. This makes available approximately 160 nursery places for children under 5 and approximately 170 holiday playscheme places for children aged between 5 to 12 years. Subsidised childcare is only

provided where there is a value for money justification which meets both staff and organisation needs. Childcare provision is, however, only one of a range of family friendly policies that the Department supports to help staff balance work and family life. Other measures include: part-time working; jobshare; flexi-time; homeworking; career breaks; maternity benefits; and paternity leave.

The cost to parents varies according to geographic location and the age of the child. In 1996–97, 241 parents used nursery facilities and 122 used the playscheme. The average cost to parents using nursery places was £63.50 per week per child; and the average cost of playschemes was £7 per day. In 1997–98, 216 parents used nurseries at an average cost of £66 per week per child. 127 parents used the holiday playscheme at an average cost of £7.25 per day.

The proportion of total staff (excluding the Prison Service) who used these facilities was 2.6 per cent. in 1996–97 and 1997–98.

Operation Bye Bye

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of Operation Bye Bye conducted in Doncaster and Sheffield. [59821]

Mr. Boateng: Operation Bye Bye was an intelligence led operation by South Yorkshire Police against individuals involved in burglary and drug dealing. Some 90 people have been arrested and further arrests are likely. I congratulate the South Yorkshire Police on their success.

Mark Darren Day

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *357*, when he expects the Criminal Cases Review Commission to conclude its consideration of the case of Mark Day, convicted of murder on 26 March 1993. [59673]

Mr. Boateng: I understand that the Commission has made progress with the detailed review of Mr. Day's case, but remains unable to say when it will complete its consideration.

Cannabis

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will consult the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs as a matter of urgency over transferring cannabis and cannabis resin from Schedule 1 to the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations 1998 to Schedule 2; [59845]

(2) if he will raise the rescheduling of cannabinoids, other than dronabinol and nabizone, from Schedule 1 to the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations 1998 to Schedule 2 with the WHO; [59842]

(3) if he will transfer cannabis and cannabis resin from Schedule 1 to the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations 1998 to Schedule 2 to allow doctors to prescribe an appropriate preparation of cannabis on a named-patient basis, and to allow doctors and pharmacists to supply the drug prescribed. [59844]

Mr. George Howarth: We are currently considering the report of the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee which made these recommendations and will provide a full reply in due course, which will deal with the question of consultation with the World Health Organisation. The Government do not, however, agree that cannabis should be re-scheduled to allow its prescription by doctors unless or until the quality, safety and efficacy of a medicinal form have been scientifically established and a marketing authorisation issued by the Medicines Control Agency.

Subject to the clear views the Government have already expressed on the Report's recommendation to re-schedule cannabis, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs will have an opportunity to hold a preliminary discussion on the report at its next meeting on 19 November.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of persons convicted of possession of cannabis over the past 12 months where use of the drug for therapeutic purposes was offered as a mitigating factor. [59914]

Mr. George Howarth: Factors pleaded in mitigation for any offence are not collected centrally by the Home Office court proceedings database.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what public statements have been made by Ministers on the recommendations of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology's report on the medicinal use of cannabis since publication of the report. [59915]

Mr. George Howarth: I said at the time of publication of the report that the Government welcomed the Committee's rejection of general legalisation of cannabis and its call for more research into the possible medical benefits; but could not agree that cannabis should be rescheduled to allow its prescription by doctors unless or until the quality, safety and efficacy of a medicinal form had been scientifically established and a marketing authorisation issued by the Medicines Control Agency. We will provide a full reply to the report in due course.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government intend to consult the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on the recommendations in the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on cannabis. [59916]

Mr. George Howarth: We are currently considering our response to the recommendations of the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on cannabis and what advice to take before doing so. Subject to the clear views the Government have already expressed on the Report's recommendation to re-schedule cannabis, the Advisory Council will have an opportunity to hold a preliminary discussion on the report at its next scheduled meeting on 19 November.

Crime (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the crime clear-up rate and annual percentage change for 1995, 1996 and 1997 in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* the West Midlands; [59549]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* number of and *(b)* annual percentage change in recorded offences in 1995, 1996 and 1997 in (i) Staffordshire and (ii) the West Midlands. [59548]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is given in the tables.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police
All offences

	Staffordshire		*West Midlands*	
Year	*Offences*	*Percentage change on previous year*	*Offences*	*Percentage change on previous year*
1995	91,495	−2.4	318,087	+0.7
1996	92,155	+0.7	317,892	−0.1
1997	89,957	−2.4	278,975	−12.2

Note:
Includes all criminal damage

Notifiable offences recorded by the police

Year	*Offences cleared up*[1]	*Percentage cleared up*[1]	*Annual percentage change in number of clear-ups*
Staffordshire			
1995	29,179	32	+2.4
1996	31,178	34	+6.9
1997	31,185	35	+0.0
West Midlands			
1995	75,279	24	−2.9
1996	72,038	23	−4.3
1997	63,132	24	−12.4

[1] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under

Police (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for Staffordshire Police Force the *(a)* number of serving officers *(b)* number of patrol officers *(c)* average police pay and *(d)* cost of the service in real terms for 1995, 1996 and 1997. [59550]

Mr. Boateng: The information provided is for the financial years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98.

Staffordshire Police

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Number of officers as at 31 March	2,209	2,211	2,292
Number of patrol officers	1,299	1,244	1,446
Average police pay (£)[1]	25,985	27,001	25,000
Police expenditure in real terms (£ million)[2]	[3]98.661	[3]104.628	[3]108.973

[1] Source: Staffordshire Police
[2] Police expenditure figures are at 1995–96 prices
[3] Police expenditure figures for 1995–96 and 1997–98 are actual expenditure; those for 1997–98 are estimates. Based on CIPFA Police Statistics.

Computer Crime

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the proposal by the National Criminal Intelligence Unit for the establishment of a national intelligence-led unit for tackling computer crime is to be proceeded with. [59645]

Mr. Boateng: The Association of Chief Police Officers, together with the National Criminal Intelligence Service, is continuing to investigate the feasibility of establishing a national computer crime unit.

Kosovo Albanian Children

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received representations about the grant of entry clearance to a number of Kosovo Albanian children to enable them to come to the United Kingdom for medical treatment, accompanied by their close relatives; and if he will make a statement. [60230]

Mr. Straw: I have received representations from Ms Sally Becker of Operation Angel about a total of 91 applications referred to the Home Office by the British Embassy in Tirana, a third of which are in respect of children needing medical treatment. The applications fell to be considered under the Immigration Rules relating to persons seeking to enter the United Kingdom as visitors for private medical treatment or simply as visitors. Under these Rules, I have to be satisfied, among other requirements, that there is satisfactory evidence about the medical condition and its treatment, that the person will be able to maintain and accommodate himself and any dependants without recourse to public funds and that the person intends to leave the United Kingdom at the end of the period of the treatment or visit. In the absence of satisfactory evidence from Operation Angel or any other source, I was not satisfied that these requirements were met in any of the applications.

I considered whether there were grounds for treating the applications on a discretionary basis outside the Immigration Rules, but concluded that it would not be appropriate to do so. In reaching this decision, I took account of the fact that Ms Becker had not taken Government advice and guidance on how to bring such an evacuation within the recognised official procedures; she had not demonstrated the option of local treatment through the international agencies; and had not made a proper case on medical grounds. I was also aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has in place a humanitarian strategy for former Yugoslavia (including Kosovo) and Albania, and will be sending a mission there this week.

Furthermore, in the absence of adequate guarantees of funding from Operation Angel, I had to take account of the likely cost to the taxpayer in the almost certain event of recourse to public funds, which, for a group of this size, would be of the order of £400,000 a year. I accordingly decided to refuse the applications. Ms Becker was notified of this decision by the British Embassy in Tirana on Friday 13 November.

Police Dogs

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what national guidelines there are for the training of police dog handlers and dogs; what plans he has to change them; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of the trial of Essex police dog trainers. [59623]

Mr. Boateng: All general-purpose police dogs and handlers receive training in-force along the lines set out in the Home Office Police Dog Training and Care Manual

which emphasises that training should be based on 'Praise and Reward'. The manual, which was revised in 1996, explains the need for self control on the part of the handler and stipulates that

'a handler should never resort to physical punishment in training the dog'.

Revision of the Manual is now the responsibility of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Sub-Committee on Police Dogs. The Chief Constable of Lancashire Constabulary, who chairs the Sub-committee, is in contact with Essex Police in order to establish whether any lessons can be learned from the case recently heard at Chelmsford Magistrates' Court. The ACPO Sub-committee is also in close touch with the RSPCA, the National Canine Defence League and other similar organisations.

Any question of disciplinary action against the police officers concerned will be a matter for the Chief Constable of Essex.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government's advertisement on domestic violence will first be shown; on which television channels it will be shown; what the cost of the advertising campaign will be; and if he will place a video of the advertising campaign in the Library. [59667]

Mr. Boateng: We are currently developing a domestic violence awareness/publicity campaign for England and Wales. The detailed content and costings of the campaign as it unfolds over the coming months have yet to be settled.

The launch of a domestic violence advertising campaign in Scotland was announced last week. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that the first television advertisement will be broadcast there on 26 December. Channels featuring the advertisement will be Scottish Television, Grampian and Borders. The production, broadcasting and other media costs will amount to about £600,000 during the first year of the campaign. A video of the advertisement will be placed in the Library.

Divorce

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the likelihood of breakdown of (i) cohabiting unions and (ii) marriages. [59062]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not commissioned any research on this question. There is evidence from research (for example, Buck and Ermisch, Cohabitation in Britain. Changing Britain 1995) that cohabiting relationships are more likely than marriages to break down.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Lone Parents

17. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if lone parents will have their benefits reduced if they fail to attend the initial interview of the new deal for lone parents. [58383]

Angela Eagle: There is no requirement for lone parents to attend for a New Deal for Lone Parents interview—the New Deal for Lone Parents is voluntary.

26. **Mr. Patrick Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the progress being made on the Government's new deal for lone parents. [58394]

27. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Government's actions to help lone parents move from income support into work. [58395]

32. **Mr. Fitzpatrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on progress on the new deal for lone parents. [58400]

Angela Eagle: The Government are committed to helping lone parents overcome the difficulties which may act as barriers to employment through the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). Under the NDLP lone parents on Income Support are offered a tailor-made personal adviser service to help them improve their employability and move from welfare into work. The programme provides support and advice on training needs, jobsearch, better-off calculations, child care information and in-work support for those who need it.

Results up to 25 September show that 9 out of 10 lone parents who attended an interview agreed to participate in the programme, and more than a quarter of these moved into work. Research on lone parents who had moved into work (and onto Family Credit) following participation in NDLP show that they are on average, £39 a week better off, and have reduced their dependency on benefit by £42 a week.

Interim findings of an independent evaluation of the NDLP in the phase 1 prototypes show that the programme is having a marked effect on the rate at which lone parents move off Income Support—around 2 percentage points reduction on the number of lone parents on Income Support compared to the control areas and almost 7 per cent. fewer new cases remaining on Income Support. A final evaluation report on the NDLP phase 1 will be available in Autumn 1999.

Means-tested Benefits

24. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits, which are not currently means tested, he plans to means test in future. [58392]

Mr. Darling: We are reforming the welfare system based on the principles we have set out to ensure the system delivers work for those who can and security for those who cannot. I announced details of our plans for reform of disability benefits and for the introduction of a single gateway to the benefit system for people of working age last month. Details of our plans for the reform of other benefits will be announced in due course.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his proposals to reduce dependence on means-tested benefits. [58403]

Angela Eagle: We believe there is a continuing role for a variety of benefits. So for instance my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement last month included proposals to reduce the reliance on means-tested help of people disabled early in life, and extend non-means-tested, non-contributory, tax free help to severely disabled young children, while also providing more generous means-tested benefits through the Disability Income Guarantee for disabled people under 60 with the highest care needs and the lowest incomes.

Child Support

30. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action the Government have taken to improve support for children through the social security system. [58398]

Angela Eagle: We have announced a series of measures which will improve the financial support given to children through the benefits system. These include:

Child Benefit for the eldest child will be increased from next April, by the largest ever amount, and from 9 November families on Income Support and Family Credit have been getting an extra £2.50 for each child under 11.

The New Deal for Lone Parents offers a tailor-made service of help and advice for people who are bringing up children on their own to make the move from Income Support into employment. We are investing over £190 million to help lone parents who want to work.

Two significant improvements in the support for disabled children were announced in October 1998 in our consultation document "A New Contract for Welfare—Support for Disabled People": the Disability Income Guarantee, and the extension of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to children aged three and four.

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress the Child Support Agency has made in clearing its backlogs; and if he will make a statement. [60231]

Angela Eagle: The Child Support Agency met its target for last year to reduce the maintenance assessment backlog (i.e. cases which are over 52 weeks old and have not yet been assessed) to less than 5 per cent. of applications received, and is on target to clear the remainder by the end of this financial year. As the older cases are cleared some Non Resident Parents will inevitably be assessed as owing arrears for periods dating back a number of years.

We can today announce that we are extending the temporary scheme introduced by the previous Government limiting the collection of arrears to six months as long as the Non Resident Parent is fully compliant for a period of 12 months.

Additionally, from Monday 30 November, we will also be extending the coverage of this scheme to include cases where arrears have arisen due to delays in reviews carried out on change of circumstance and in the reviews carried out every two years as required by Section 16 of the Child Support Act 1991.

The extension of this scheme is another indication of the continuing difficulties faced by the Child Support Agency. The complexity of the current formula, continues to limit the Agency's ability to provide the kind of service the public has the right to expect. Our proposals for a new, simple, straightforward and transparent service were set out in the Green Paper "CHILDREN FIRST: a new approach to child support" published in July this year.

Welfare to Work

31. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement concerning the support available through the new deal to disabled people with communication difficulties. [58399]

Mr. Timms: People taking part in the New Deal for Disabled People will have access to the range of disability programmes currently provided by the Employment Service. This includes the Access to Work Programme which provides tailored support for people with communication difficulties.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the number of personal advisers which will be required for the implementation of the single benefit gateway; [58766]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of training and maintaining a personal adviser under the single benefit gateway; [58748]

(3) what targets he plans to set for the ratio of benefit claimants to personal advisers. [58749]

Angela Eagle: The single gateway will be piloted in 12 locations, commencing in June 1999.

One of the main reasons for piloting this initiative before introduction nationally is to estimate the number of staff required to meet our objective of ensuring all benefit claimants of working age have access to a personal adviser.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sanctions will be imposed on those who do not attend the initial interview under the single benefit gateway. [58765]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *552*.

Incapacity Benefit

33. **Mr. Collins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the financial implications of his proposed changes to incapacity benefit. [58401]

Mr. Timms: The modernisation of Incapacity Benefit for new claimants, with reformed contribution conditions and the taking into account of 50 per cent. of amounts of occupational and personal pensions over £50 a week, will reduce expenditure on Incapacity Benefit by £90 million in the first year (2001–02), rising to some £650 to £700 million a year in the long run.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to reform the all work test. [58396]

Mr. Timms: We intend to reform the test so that, as well as determining entitlement to benefit, it provides additional, constructive, information about people's

capacities which, together with a wider employability assessment, can be used to help them plan for a return to work.

Pensions Green Paper

34. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long the consultation period following the Green Paper on pensions will be. [58402]

36. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Government's pension review. [58404]

Mr. Denham: As set out in the Green Paper "New Ambitions for our country: A New Contract for Welfare" (Cm 3805), we intend to publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year. Details of the consultation will be announced when the Green Paper is published.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the publication date is for the Green Paper on Pensions. [58382]

Mr. Denham: As set out in the Green Paper, "New Ambitions for our country: A New Contract for Welfare", we will publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year.

Benefits (Women)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to examine the effects on women of benefits lost due to their earning less than the national insurance lower earnings limit; and if he will make a statement. [58377]

Mr. Denham: We have announced a number of measures to help women in low-paid employment, including the Working Families Tax Credit and the national minimum wage. Data from the Labour Force Survey indicated that about 700,000 women will be floated above the lower earnings limit as a result of the national minimum wage, assuming there is no change in the number of hours they work. As part of our programme of welfare reform we are considering the best way of delivering support to all those who need help through the social security system, including low-paid women.

State Pensions

37. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make it easier for pensioners to have their pensions paid directly into bank accounts. [58405]

Mr. Denham: Under existing arrangements, pensioners are able to choose from a number of ways in which to receive their retirement pension. One way is to have it paid directly into their bank accounts.

Prospective pensioners are advised about the options for payment on the claim form issued to them before their retirement date.

The choice of payment to a bank account can be made at the time a claim is made or at any time thereafter.

There are no current plans to make any changes in these arrangements.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the gross and net cost of *(a)* raising the basic retirement pension and linked benefits to £90 per week for a single person and £144 for a couple and *(b)* paying an additional non-contributory benefit of £40 per week to each person over pension age. [56016]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is in the table.

£ billion

	Raise RP and linked benefits to £90	*As previous column plus £40 non-contributory benefit*
Gross cost	14.5	36.5
Means-tested benefit offset	−3.0	−5.5
Net costs	11.5	30.5

Notes:

1. Gross costs have been estimated by the Government Actuary's Department

2. Means-tested benefit offsets are based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey and the May 1996 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, both uprated to 1998–99 benefit and earnings levels. These do not take account of the changes to IS rates which will be introduced in 1999–2000

3. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £0.5 billion

4. Where both members of a couple are in receipt of a Category A pension, they have each been awarded a basic state pension of £90 per week, pro-rated according to the percentage of the full pension which they receive

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what total lifetime contribution to SERPs for a single man would provide an addition to the basic state pension equal to the increase in income support available under the forthcoming minimum pension guarantee of £75 a week. [58505]

Mr. Denham: A person retiring in 1999–2000 who had been contracted into SERPs since its introduction in 1978 would need to have had constant real earnings of approximately £100 per week (in 1999–2000) terms to receive a gross weekly income from the basic State Pension and SERPS of around £75.

Note:

Assuming the individual is entitled to a full State Pension of £66.75 (April 1999 rate). The calculation does not take account of the fact that SERPs is taxable and so might not produce a net State Pension of £75, but since taxation is dependent largely upon individual circumstances it is not possible to take account of this detail.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *603–05*, what estimate he has made of the total amount by which those entitled to SERPS have been underpaid *(a)* weekly and *(b)* since the introduction of NIRS 2 because of problems with that system. [59091]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The estimated total amount of SERPS being underpaid weekly is about £620,000. The total amount estimated to have been underpaid since April is about £7.7 million.

Earnings Disregards

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons earnings disregards were not increased in the annual uprating of social security benefits. [58385]

Mr. Denham: We believe that, for those who are able to undertake it, paid work is the surest route out of poverty. This is why our welfare reform programme has focused on making work pay and providing new and innovative ways to help people on benefit make an early return to work through the New Deals for unemployed people, lone parents, people with a disability or long-term illness and through initiatives like Employment Zones.

Disabled People

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by income bands of £10 and by gender the numbers of gainers and losers classified by each change proposed in "Support for Disabled People". [58122]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The information is not available in the format requested. In particular it is not possible to identify the position in the income distribution of those who will be affected by the changes using income bands of £10. Such information as is available is as follows:

Incapacity Benefit

We estimate that around 55,000 men and 10,000 women will be affected by the proposed changes to Incapacity Benefit in the first year following the change (2001–02).

The vast majority of those who no longer qualify for Incapacity Benefit as a result of the proposed change to the contribution conditions are expected to be in the first and second quintiles of the household income distribution and to be already claiming income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support. Their entitlement to these benefits will not be affected by this change and some may benefit from the proposed Disability Income Guarantee. The remainder of those who will no longer qualify for Incapacity Benefit will be people who are not entitled to income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support because they have other income. They are expected to be predominantly in the middle of the household income distribution.

We expect that the majority of those who will have their Incapacity Benefit reduced as a result of taking some account of occupational and personal pensions over £50 a week will be in the top two quintiles of the household income distribution.

Both these changes will apply only to new claims for Incapacity Benefit. No-one who is already receiving Incapacity Benefit at the point of change will be affected.

Severe Disablement Allowance

We estimate that around 5,000 women and 3,000 men under 20 will gain by receiving the long-term rate of Incapacity Benefit at the end of the first year following the change. In addition, around 12,000 women and 8,000 men under 20 who were claiming Severe Disablement Allowance at the point of change will transfer to the long-term rate of Incapacity Benefit at the end of the first year.

People aged 20 or over who are already receiving Severe Disablement Allowance at the point of change will continue to receive the benefit, but no new claims from people aged 20 or over will be accepted. We estimate that around 10,000 women and 6,000 men aged 20 or over will no longer be able to claim Severe Disablement Allowance in the first year following the change. We estimate that, of those, around 6,000 women and 5,000 men will qualify for Income Support and will therefore see no change in their overall income. The 4,000 women and 1,000 men whom we estimate will not qualify for Income Support are expected to be concentrated in the middle of the household income distribution.

Disability Income Guarantee

We estimate that around 51,000 single men, 51,000 single women and 43,000 couples aged under 60, together with 30,000 disabled children, will benefit from this change in the first year (2001–02).

We expect that the majority of those who benefit will be in the second and third quintiles of the household income distribution.

Disability Living Allowance

We estimate that around 8,000 disabled children with severe mobility problems will benefit in the first year (2001–02) from our proposal to extend the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to children aged 3 and 4. It is not possible to identify where the families concerned fall within the household income distribution.

Notes:

1. Income quintiles are 20 per cent. bands of household net equivalised income. The first quintile is the lowest band; the fifth quintile is the top band.

2. Position in the income distribution is determined after housing costs and represents the expected position before the changes come into effect.

3. Incomes are equivalised to adjust for household size and compositions. No adjustment is made to household income to reflect any additional needs that claimants of these benefits may have. To the extent that these people have any additional disability related costs then their position in the household income standard could overstate their relative living standards.

4. The information showing where recipients of various benefits are in the income distribution is taken from the 1995–96 and 1996–97 Households Below Average Income datasets based on the 1995–96 and 1996–97 Family Resources Surveys (FRS). The FRS is a sample survey of the GB population and all estimates must be treated as approximate.

5. Information on the number of claimants likely to be affected by each of the proposed changes is derived from the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 1998; the Disability Living Allowance Quarterly Extract, February 1998; and a 1 per cent. sample of 1996–97 claims for Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance produced by DSS Analytical Services Division. All figures are estimates and must be treated as approximate.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of claimants who will lose eligibility to the severe disablement allowance under his proposals set out in "Support for Disabled People"; and if he will break down this total between male and female claimants. [58301]

Mr. Timms: It is estimated that each year, around 16,000 people who become disabled after the age of 20 will no longer be able to claim Severe Disablement Allowance. Of these approximately 10,000 will be women and 6,000 will be men. For those eligible, Income Support will still be available; current statistical data indicate that nearly 70 per cent. of this group already claim Income Support.

War Pensions (Prisoners)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of war pensions are currently serving prison sentences; and what payments of war pensions have been made in respect of those people. [59204]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the War Pensions Agency is a matter for its Chief Executive, Mr. Gordon Hextall. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Gordon Hextall to Mr. Michael Hancock, dated 12 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of War Pensioners currently serving prison sentences and the payments being made to them.

It is the Secretary of State's normal policy that payments of War Disablement Pension (WDP) are forfeited during imprisonment. This is because it is considered inappropriate to make a payment from public funds to someone who has committed a criminal offence and is being maintained at public expense. On release the WDP is normally restored and, to assist with resettlement, it is the normal policy that arrears of one year's basic pension (or arrears for the period of imprisonment if less than a year) are paid. The Secretary of State also has discretion, in exceptional circumstances, to continue payment whilst a war pensioner is in prison.

Unfortunately statistics of war pensioners currently serving prison sentences are not kept as a matter of course. To identify such cases would require a manual analysis of the case files relating to all 254,209 War Pensioners. The information could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope that you find my reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of assessing income support entitlements on the basis of actual income from capital rather than tariff income, with no upper capital limit on eligibility. [58970]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The estimated costs are £200 million in Income Support, and a further £80 million in Jobseeker's Allowance. The present tariff is not intended to represent any return that could be obtained from investing capital. The system provides a straightforward method of calculating the weekly contribution which people with capital in excess of the lower limit are expected to make from those resources to help meet their normal living expenses. The rules are designed to ensure that help is targeted at those who need it most whilst not entirely denying benefit to those with only a modest amount of capital.

Notes:

1. The estimates have been based upon net investment income, as tax paid on investment income is already deducted from the income brought to account for Income Support in our model.

2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million and have been based on the Department's Policy Simulation Model of income-related benefits. This model draws data from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey, uprated to 1999–2000 levels, and calibrates results to forecast benefit caseloads. This calibration is consistent with the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review forecasts.

3. Results should be regarded as subject to a high degree of uncertainty. They should be interpreted not as precise point estimates, but as indicative only of broad magnitudes.

Habitual Residence Test

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take into account in his review of the habitual residence test its application to spouses of those serving abroad in the armed forces when they return to the United Kingdom following separation from their partner. [59060]

Angela Eagle: The Government are currently examining the habitual residence test as it operates now and considering the need and possible scope for reform. As part of this work we are exploring a wide range of issues, such as the position of spouses who return to the UK following separation from their partner.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the range of qualifying benefits for eligibility for extended housing benefit; what plans he has to extend the range; and what assistance with rent payments is available to people starting paid employment who have to work a month before being paid. [59339]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 681–702, our intention to widen the group eligible for extended payments of Housing and Council Tax Benefit to include former Income Support claimants who were incapacitated. The effect of this change is to make extended payments available to all the poorest people returning to work after 26 weeks out of a job.

The Extended Payment scheme is designed to encourage the long term unemployed who are capable of work to take up work, by removing the uncertainty many face about whether they will be able to pay their rent and council tax during the gap between the last payment of benefit and receipt of their first wages. It allows claims for Housing and Council Tax Benefit to continue for the first four weeks after starting work, regardless of earnings.

We are also considering other ways of easing the transition into work. As the Welfare Reform Green Paper makes clear we are looking at a range of proposals for improving the work incentives offered by Housing Benefit. This review is examining Housing Benefit and the way it is delivered.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what percentage of winter fuel payment cheques issued over the winter of 1997 were returned to local benefit agencies in *(a)* each London borough and *(b)* each London parliamentary constituency; and what was the national average; [59390]

(2) how long he estimates it will take for all work on winter fuel payment cheques issued during winter 1997 to have been completed in *(a)* each London borough, *(b)* each London parliamentary constituency and *(c)* nationally; [59392]

(3) how many Benefits Agency staff have been working on winter fuel payments relating to the winter of 1997 in *(a)* each London borough and *(b)* each London parliamentary constituency; and what is the national average; [59391]

(4) what procedures are in place for dealing with this year's round of winter fuel payments; and how these differ from those in force in the previous year. [59393]

Angela Eagle: The administration of the Winter Fuel Payments scheme is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Edward Davey, dated 12 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary questions asking, in *(a)* each London Borough and *(b)* each London Parliamentary Constituency, what percentage of Winter Fuel Payment cheques issued over the winter of 1997 were returned to local Benefit Agencies (BA) and what was the national average; when is it estimated that all work on the backlog of Winter Fuel Payments will have been completed and what is the national average; how many BA staff have been working on Winter Fuel Payments relating to the winter of 1997 and what is the national average. You also asked what procedures are in place for addressing this year's round of Winter Fuel Payments and how these differ from those in force in the previous year.

The making of Winter Fuel Payments to almost 10 million pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 was a challenging task for the BA. This was achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

Not all of the information requested is available. The information that is available is not in the format requested. The BA collate Winter Fuel Payments scheme statistics by BA District which do not correspond to Parliamentary Constituencies or Local Authority boundaries. It would only be possible to provide figures in those formats at disproportionate cost. I am, however, able to tell you that in excess of 9.76 million Winter Fuel Payments were issued during the 1997–98 winter. Of these payments, the national average of returned payments was less than 2.07 per cent.

In excess of 9.76 million Winter Fuel Payments were made automatically by 31 March 1998. All payments were made to eligible pensioners based on official records. Whilst we have issued all payments and do not consider there to be a backlog, it is possible that a small number of pensioners have not yet been paid because the original girocheque was not cashed, or they have not yet queried their entitlement. It is not possible to estimate how many of these cases are outstanding. Local BA offices and the Winter Fuel Helpline are on hand to give advice to pensioners who feel that they are entitled to an initial or further payment.

Information is not available in relation to the number of staff employed exclusively on the Winter Fuel Payments scheme as those involved were also involved in other areas of work. However, funding for the administration of last winter's scheme was allocated and distributed to each of the BA's 13 Area Directorates (ADs) and our Pensions and Overseas Directorate. These ADs do not correspond to specific Local Authority or parliamentary constituency boundaries. Three ADs cover the south east and in total they received £669,800 to administer the scheme. This would be equivalent to some 130 full time staff posts for the duration of last year's Winter Fuel Payment exercise. Nationally, ADs received £2,140,500 to administer the scheme. This would be equivalent to some 421 full time staff posts for the duration of last year's exercise.

For the forthcoming winter delivery of payments will be broadly similar to last winter's exercise. Eligible pensioners in receipt of Income Support and Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance will be issued with a £50 payment by the end of November. Payments to other eligible pensioners will be made during January and will again be made automatically (a claim does not have to be made). The BA's Generalised Matching Service will be used to compare addresses in order to decide whether £10 or £20 is payable. Poste Restante arrangements whereby girocheques are issued direct to Post Offices will again be used for Retirement Pension, Graduated Retirement Benefit and Widow's Benefit Pension customers normally paid by order book. Around 5 million payments will be despatched to Post Offices over a three week period from 5 to 22 January 1999.

There is no doubt that the BA has learnt from the problems experienced by some pensioners last year and having had more time to effectively plan for this winter's payments, I am confident that we will improve the administration of this winter's scheme.

For last winter's payments the address data held for some customers was insufficient to make matching possible. In anticipation for this winter's payments an exercise to investigate and improve this data has been carried out. The BA, wherever possible, has ensured that the majority of eligible pensioners' addresses are now compatible with Post Office address records and can more accurately be included in the automated scans used in the identification process.

Technical changes to the data cleansing process should ensure that the incidents where both members of a couple who live in the same household each receive £20 will reduce. Scans based on surname, sex, postcode and date of marriage will match couples who share these details and will give a higher level of reliability this winter.

Improvements to the Pensions Computer System will allow BA local office staff to automatically issue additional payments where eligible pensioners have not received their full entitlement as opposed to clerically producing the additional payments. The additional girocheques will be printed and despatched automatically from the central computer centres and therefore the payments should be received more quickly.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59738]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer the then Minister for Welfare Reform, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), gave my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 2 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 256.

There are no separate arrangements for maintaining registers for inspection by hon. Members and members of the public.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59722]

Angela Eagle: The staff of this Department, including all the Agencies, have access to nursery places and holiday playschemes in a variety of locations across the country. The cost of this childcare varies according to the age of the child, the nature of the provision and the location of the childcare. However, there is a subsidy available to staff of up to £30 per child per week. This represents up to 50 per cent. subsidy on the total cost of care.

Each business unit is responsible for making their own detailed arrangements which are suitable for local circumstances. Detailed information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is developing its family friendly policies further, of which childcare is one, but not the only, dimension.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of claimants in

1997–98 for *(a)* jobseeker's allowance (income based), *(b)* jobseeker's allowance (contribution based only), *(c)* housing benefit with jobseeker's allowance and *(d)* council tax benefit with jobseeker's allowance. [59564]

Angela Eagle: The information is set out in the table. There is an overlap in the figures as most claimants receive both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Jobseeker's Allowance claimants, May 1997

	Number of recipients
Jobseeker's Allowance (Income-based)	1,224,000
Jobseeker's Allowance (Contribution-based only)	181,000
Housing Benefit with Jobseeker's Allowance	693,000
Council Tax Benefit with Jobseeker's Allowance	686,000

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Information refers to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
3. Figures will undercount the number of unemployed jobseeker's as they exclude claimants receiving National Insurance Credits only.
4. Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit figures do not include second adult rebate cases.
5. The figures shown are at May 1997, and are the latest available in the period specified.

Sources:

1. Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, May 1997.
2. Housing Benefit Management information System, annual 1 per cent. sample of claimants with and without Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance, taken at the end of May 1997.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if individuals receiving *(a)* interim estimated benefits and *(b)* initial awards of (i) retirement pensions, (ii) incapacity benefit and (iii) jobseeker's allowance payments will be given the correct payments in due course. [59573]

Mr. Timms: Yes. When information is available from NIRS2, the claims of all individuals receiving interim payments and initial awards of Retirement Pension, Incapacity Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance will be looked at again and the correct amount of benefit put into payment. Arrears will be paid as appropriate.

Centenarians

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, by county, the number of centenarians in receipt of the state pension. [59897]

Mr. Denham: Information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

There are approximately 8,000 people over the age of 100 years who are in receipt of the State Retirement Pension in Great Britain.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:

National Population Projections supplied by the Government Actuary's Department for mid-year 1998.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently in receipt of severe disablement allowance became eligible to receive the allowance at age 20 years or over. [59834]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

As at March 1997, the latest date for which information is available, there were 385,000 Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) recipients. Of those, 134,000 were ex-Housewives Non Contributory Invalidity Pension or ex-Non Contributory Invalidity Pension recipients who were transferred automatically on to SDA when it was introduced in 1984. Of those qualifying for SDA after that date, 174,600 did so at the age of 20 or over.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the proportion of his Department's computer systems which will be millennium-compliant on 1 April 1999. [58848]

Mr. Timms: All but one of the Department's business critical computer systems will have been fully tested and corrected for millennium compliance by 1 April 1999. The supplier of the remaining system, the new National Insurance Recording System, was required to deliver it compliant and testing to confirm that will be complete by 31 October 1999, or earlier if possible. The target date for completion of work on non-business critical computer systems is 31 August 1999.

Social Security Expenditure

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the percentage increase in cash terms and *(b)* the percentage increase in real terms in the grand total of (1) all social security expenditure and (2) non-cyclical social security expenditure, including in each case relevant expenditure by local government and by all departments of central Government, and including the cost of the working families tax credit, between (i) 1978–79 and 1982–83, (ii) 1982–83 and 1986–87, (iii) 1986–87 and 1991–92, (iv) 1991–92 and 1996–97 and (v) 1996–97 and 2001–02; and if he will set out in each case the totals which underlie these estimates. [59863]

Mr. Darling: The information requested is in the tables.

Percentage increase in expenditure

	1978–79 to 1982–83	*1982–83 to 1986–87*	*1986–87 to 1991–92*	*1991–92 to 1996–97*	*1996–97 to 2001–02*
Grand total					
Cash	98.8	41.9	48.2	38.4	25.7
Real	22.9	18.7	7.4	21.3	10.8
Non-cyclical social security benefit expenditure					
Cash	85.8	38.6	52.4	41.1	21.3
Real	14.9	15.9	10.5	23.7	6.8

Expenditure

£ million

	1978–79	*1982–83*	*1986–87*	*1991–92*	*1996–97*	*2001–02*
Cash prices						
Grant total[1]	16,605	33,008	46,851	69,441	96,081	120,809
Total DSS expenditure	16,410	32,381	46,496	65,089	90,289	105,765
Total expenditure by other Government departments[2]	195	627	355	4,352	5,793	15,044
Non-cyclical social security expenditure	14,241	26,457	36,672	55,903	78,885	95,684
Real terms (1997–98 prices)						
Grant total[1]	51,866	63,766	75,704	81,300	98,580	109,180
Total DSS expenditure	51,257	62,555	75,130	76,205	92,637	95,584
Total expenditure by other Government departments[2]	609	1,211	574	5,095	5,943	13,596
Non-cyclical social security benefit expenditure	44,482	51,111	59,256	65,450	80,936	86,474

[1] Includes DSS, other Government Departments' and Local Authority Benefit Expenditure and Administration costs. For 2001–02 the figures also include the cost of the Working Families Tax Credit and the Disabled Person's Tax Credit.
[2] Expenditure includes the cost of assistance with Housing costs met by Local Authorities and reflects the changes made to Housing Benefit schemes since 1978. For 2001–02 the figures also include the cost of the Working Families Tax Credit and the Disabled Person's Tax Credit.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide an update of Figure 3 from his most recent Departmental Annual Report to cover the remainder of the planning period. [59862]

Mr. Darling: The Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report published in June 1998 changed some of the definitions of the items of Social Security expenditure contained in figure 3. It is not, therefore, possible to provide information in the format requested. We are currently exploring the possibility of producing the equivalent of figure 3 for the 1999 Departmental Report.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Compensation Claims

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the last year for which figures are available. [59051]

Mr. Mudie: During the 1997–98 financial year the Department made compensation payments totalling *(a)* £232,197 in respect of personal injury claims and *(b)* £70,804 in respect of employment protection claims.

Higher Education

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many higher education students have withdrawn from courses before completion in each of the last five years. [59341]

Mr. Mudie: The available information is given in the following table which is taken from the Departmental Annual Report 1998.

Academic Year	*Full-time and sandwich first degree drop-out rates[1] (percentage)*
1991–92	17
1992–93	17
1993–94	[2]17–18
1994–95	[2]17–18
1995–96	[2]18–19

Notes:
[1] The institutional coverage of the drop-out rates is restricted to the former UFC universities in the UK and former polytechnics in England. first degree students in other UK HE institutions are excluded. Drop out covers all those leaving degree courses because of exam failure, ill health, personal and other reasons. It includes those switching to a lower level course but it excludes students transferring between degree courses or subjects. The rate for each academic year reflects the progression of students through the whole length of course. The rate is a weighted sum of the separate university and former polytechnic figures based upon graduate numbers. The calculation for the polytechnic drop-out rate is necessarily approximate because of significant limitations in the underlying data, in practice it has been necessary to estimate drop-out in 1991–92 to 1995–96 from the change in two successive years for a sample of around half of the 29 English former polytechnics.
[2] A range is given because the introduction of a new data source made it difficult to measure drop-out accurately.

The Department is currently working with the higher education funding bodies in the UK to develop a method of calculating drop-out rates which can be applied to all UK higher education institutions and which takes into account the non-traditional routes that some students follow. These routes may include changing courses or institutions, repeating years or leaving higher education for a year or more before continuing their studies. The Department expects to be in a position to publish figures based upon the new methodology by the time of next year's Departmental Report.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students from Doncaster Borough gained higher education places for the academic years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1996–97 and *(d)* 1995–96; and what proportion the figures represent of those leaving school at 18 years. [59305]

Mr. Mudie: Figures for the number of accepted applicants are given in the table. (Data for 1998 are not yet available.) It is not possible to show these figures as

a proportion of the number of 18-year-old school leavers in Doncaster because school leaver data by age and local authority are not available centrally.

Accepted applicants to higher education courses[1] from Doncaster local education authority

Year of entry	Accepted applicants Aged 18	All ages
1995	654	1,052
1996	653	1,042
1997	588	991

[1] Full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses

New Deal

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of people in the Tynemouth constituency who will benefit from the new deal for the long-term unemployed. [59010]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The 1998–99 planning assumptions for new deal 25+ are not yet available. The first statistical information will be available in the GSS press notice due to be published in mid December.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statistics he is collecting on the interval between interviews given to those on the gateway under the new deal for young people. [59176]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* Whilst the progress of each individual new deal client from one interview to another throughout the gateway is carefully monitored by their personal adviser, consolidated statistics could be produced at present only through disproportionate additional bureaucracy and cost.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have been sanctioned under the New Deal *(a)* by reason, *(b)* by category of intake, *(c)* by region, *(d)* by option where relevant and *(e)* by month, up to the most recent date for which the information is available. [59175]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* National to September, 1,352 new deal participants have been sanctioned, either under new deal sanction categories or through general Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) adjudication. The breakdown, by categories and regions, is as follows:

	ES region									
	OS	*NOR*	*NW*	*YHU*	*OW*	*WM*	*EME*	*SW*	*LSE*	*GB*
Failure to attend an adviser interview, training or an Employment programme, failure to accept an employment programme	22	74	88	175	87	87	78	22	102	735
Misconduct whilst on training or an Employment Programme	5	16	8	7	3	1	3	1	2	46
Giving up training or an Employment Programme	7	24	19	27	13	4	7	2	11	114
Refusal of employment, proposed JSAg variation, failure to provide a signed declaration, failure to comply with direction	1	5	14	37	4	11	5	4	19	100
Non-availability, not actively seeking work, neglect to avail oneself of an employment opportunity	5	19	30	15	5	17	5	2	8	106
Dismissal from, or leaving voluntary employment	16	23	34	18	18	41	28	21	52	251
Total	56	161	193	279	130	161	126	52	194	1,352

OS—Office for Scotland
NOR—Northern
NW—North-West
YHU—Yorkshire and Humberside
OW—Office for Wales
WM—West Midlands
EME—East Midlands and Eastern
SW—South West
LSE—London and South-East
GB—National totals

Disabled People (Discrimination)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to combat discrimination against disabled people in matters not yet covered by legislation. [58389]

Ms Hodge: The Disability Rights Task Force was set up in December 1997 to consider how best to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people within the context of our wider society, and to make recommendations on the role and functions of a Disability Rights Commission.

It provided Government with its recommendations on the role and functions of the Disability Rights Commission before Easter. These formed the basis of the White Paper Promoting disabled people's rights—Creating a Disability Rights Commission fit for the 21st Century. We intend to legislate to create the Disability Rights Commission as soon as the Parliamentary timetable allows.

The Disability Rights Task Force is expected to report on the wider issues by July 1999.

Road Haulage Industry

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment has been made of the extent of *(a)* job losses and *(b)* business failures, in the United Kingdom road haulage industry since 1 May 1997. [59343]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have not made such an assessment, but have considered information which is

available on an area which broadly corresponds to the road haulage industry—the service component of the road haulage industry (that is, freight transport by road):

For this category;

(a) information from the Summer 1998 Labour Force Survey suggests there were around 250,000 people in the UK in employment. This was not significantly different from the number in employment in Summer 1997 of approximately 245,000.

(b) in the UK during 1997, there were around:

3,300 business start-ups, enterprises registering for value added tax; and

3,850 business closures, enterprises de-registering from VAT.

Below the VAT registration threshold, enterprises are included only if they have chosen to register voluntarily or not to de-register.

Youth Service

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what assessment he has made of the contribution of the Youth Service to lifelong learning; [59335]

(2) what factors underlay his decision on the priority given to the Youth Service in his Department's consultative document "The Learning Age". [59337]

Mr. Mudie: The Youth Service has an important part to play in helping to deliver Government policies on lifelong learning. This was acknowledged in the Green Paper "The Learning Age". To build on this, we plan to put forward more detailed proposals on the future of the Youth Service in the context of the full range of services for young people. This will extend the discussion by linking the Youth Service to developments across the range of learning provision for young people.

University College of St. Mark and St. John

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will grant the University College of St. Mark and St. John university status. [59348]

Mr. Mudie: It is for the Privy Council to award university status. My Department advises the Privy Council on applications from institutions in England, taking account of published criteria. The College of St. Mark and St. John does not currently meet these criteria. The Government have announced that colleges with the power to award their own degrees may apply for 'university college' titles. The College of St. Mark and St. John has notified its intention to apply for degree awarding powers.

Mature Students

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many mature students were accepted for *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time courses in higher education in each of the last three years. [59261]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* Information for the three most recent years available is given in the following table:

Mature[1] home entrants (thousands) to higher education courses in the UK[2]

	Postgraduate		Undergraduate	
Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1995–96	27.6	68.0	118.7	231.2
1996–97	28.1	62.6	115.4	230.7
1997–98	28.6	64.1	110.5	239.4

[1] Mature students are defined as postgraduates aged 25 and over, and undergraduates aged 21 and over.

[2] The figures include those entering to study for a higher education qualification in either higher education institutions or further education institutions in the UK.

Higher education entrant figures for 1998–99 will not be available until April 1999.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which benefits will be included in the criteria to determine eligibility for free tuition for part-time mature students in higher education from 1999–2000. [59264]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* Relevant benefits for this purpose will include Income Support and the Jobseeker's Allowance. Further guidance on eligibility will be given to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and will take account of announced changes to the benefit system.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which categories of courses will be included in the eligibility criteria for free tuition for part-time mature students in higher education from 1999–2000. [59265]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* Part-time undergraduate courses at degree, diploma and certificate level in all subjects will be eligible where they are funded from 1999–2000 onwards by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the annual cost of providing free tuition for mature students on part-time courses of higher education from 1999–2000. [59263]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* We are providing £5 million in the first year to enable fees to be waived for those starting part-time undergraduate courses from 1999–2000 onwards who are in receipt of benefits.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to award the first individual learning accounts; and which category of students will be eligible. [56203]

Mr. Mudie: A national framework for individual learning accounts will be in place in the year 2000. It will begin with one million 'starter' accounts. Around 100,000 of these will start to become available from Spring 1999. Under the national framework learning accounts will be available to all, although we expect the starter accounts to be mainly targeted at those who will benefit most. The four groups outlined in the Green Paper "The Learning Age" were people without qualifications or with low skills, areas of skill shortage, employees in small firms and people returning to work.

Lifelong Learning

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many bids he has received for financial support to establish local authority lifelong learning development plans; and if he will list the successful applicants. [59260]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* We are allocating financial support over the next three financial years to all Local Education Authorities in England to strengthen the contribution they make to lifelong learning. No bids will be required. Local Education Authorities will be asked to use this money to develop new, high quality, initiatives to widen participation in learning, in partnership with local learning providers, and to underpin future development activity with Local Authority Lifelong Learning Development Plans.

Special Needs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment within what period of time he will determine the need for legislation on the areas of the provision for special educational needs as set out in the Government's paper "Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme of Action". [59835]

Ms Estelle Morris: "Meeting Special Educational Needs: A programme of action" states that if necessary we will legislate, when parliamentary time allows, to:

require all LEAs to have a parent partnership scheme and establish conciliation arrangements; and

require LEAs to comply with Tribunal orders, having regard to new guidance on reasonable timescales for implementing them.

Parent Partnership Scheme

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out the definition of a parent partnership scheme as referred to in the Government's action programme for SEN; and what will be the requirements to qualify for such schemes. [59831]

Ms Estelle Morris: A parent partnership scheme is a scheme which is designed to encourage effective partnership between parents, Local Education Authorities, schools and voluntary bodies in identifying and meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs. I would also expect such schemes to provide information and advisory services for parents. Local schemes which fulfil these requirements are currently eligible for support under the Standards Fund. Support for such schemes will be increased to £6m in 1999–2000.

Infant Class Teachers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out the basis for the calculation of the numbers of extra infant class teachers in post in September recently announced by his Department. [59668]

Ms Estelle Morris: We provided grants of £22 million to 65 local education authorities to provide 1,527 extra teachers to reduce infant class sizes from this September. The figure of 1,527 is based on information supplied by local education authorities to the Department.

Funding

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much of the £16 billion extra expenditure on education over the next three years, excluding that accounted for by increases in education standard spending assessments, capital funds and the standards fund, will be available for direct expenditure by schools. [59833]

Ms Estelle Morris: The majority of the £16 billion for education in England announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review will reach schools through Education Standard Spending, capital funds and the Standards Fund. Schools will benefit from direct grant funding for reducing class sizes where a total of £560 million will be spent from 1999 to 2002, and from programmes such as the new Education Action Zones. Full details will be published in my Department's Annual Report in the Spring.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to improve provision for 16 and 17-year-olds who are no longer able to remain in the parental home and who are not in paid employment. [56454]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

We are concerned that too many young people are not in either paid employment, training or education. This can lead to disaffection among young people, particularly young men.

There are a number of initiatives underway across Government Departments which will have an impact on education, training and employment opportunities for all young people, and we have set up a Ministerial Group to look specifically at issues affecting boys and young men. The Green Paper "Supporting Families", which was published on 4 November, sets out proposals for strengthening the family unit and providing support to those families dealing with particular problems such as truancy, low educational achievement and bad behaviour, all of which can lead on to unemployment or homelessness among young adults. More broadly, the Social Exclusion Unit is looking at teenage pregnancy and, as announced at the launch of the Womens Unit on 9 November, the issue of underachievement by teenage girls will be examined in the New Year.

In addition, a new educational maintenance allowance—linked to attendance and based on parental income—will be piloted for 16–18 year olds. If, as we expect, the new allowance succeeds in encouraging more young people to stay on in education, we plan to introduce it nationally, using money currently spent on post-16 Child Benefit.

These initiatives are designed to ensure that we tackle the problems in a holistic way, in addition to addressing the question of support through the Social Security system. Our overall aim is to see as many young people as possible staying on in education and training, including those already in jobs.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Open Day

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's open day held on 15 October; how many visitors attended; and how many groups were represented. [58822]

Mr. Fatchett: The FCO Open Day was, as last year, a great success. There was a total of 589 visitors, including 66 Parliamentary groups, 47 led by MPs. There was particular emphasis on the FCO's commitment to equal opportunities; the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment with responsibility for employment and equal opportunities, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), presented the FCO with the "Two Ticks" certificate the FCO has won for its positive attitude to disabled people. The two half day sessions included visits to departments at work, video-conference links with British Embassies overseas and our Mission to the UN, and an exhibition by departments, staff associations and others. The feedback from visitors was very positive, with the video conference as the highlight for most visitors. The day demonstrated the openness of the FCO; we hope to repeat it next year.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have recently taken place in the food rations for the displaced Tamil population in the Vanni; and if he will make a statement. [59485]

Mr. Fatchett: The Sri Lankan Government reduced rations to those affected by the conflict in the North and East in July. Rations were restored to pre-July levels in early September except in the uncleared areas of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi in the Vanni. Although the situation is difficult, we understand from Non-Governmental Organisations operating in the area that there is at present sufficient food there. We will continue to impress upon the Sri Lankan Government the need to ensure that adequate supplies reach the civilian population.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what inquiries he has made to ensure that recent arms exports to Sri Lanka are not being used for internal repression; if recent exports of arms to Sri Lanka comply with the Government's ethical foreign policy; and if he will make a statement. [59484]

Mr. Fatchett: The most effective way of ensuring that defence exports are not used for internal repression is to carry out a thorough assessment of this risk when considering whether to authorise an export. For proposed exports to Sri Lanka we take into account reporting from our High Commission in Colombo and other relevant reports, including those of Non-Governmental Organisations.

Export licence applications to Sri Lanka are considered scrupulously on a case by case basis with reference to national and EU criteria. We do not license for export military equipment if there is a clearly identifiable risk that it might be used for the purpose of internal repression. Particular attention is paid both to the Sri Lankan Government's human rights record and their legitimate defence and domestic security interests.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the use of unauthorised places of detention by armed groups supported by the Sri Lanka Government; and if he will make a statement. [59660]

Mr. Fatchett: We are concerned about reports that unauthorised places of detention are used by armed groups. We regularly raise our concerns about human rights issues with the Sri Lankan Government as I did when I visited Sri Lanka on 10 November.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the practice of the army and the police in the north and east of Sri Lanka of allowing armed groups to carry out search operations and screen civilians; and if he will make a statement. [59663]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received reports that armed groups have stopped and searched civilians in Sri Lanka, particularly in Vavuniya and the Eastern towns of Trincomalee and Batticaloa. We are also concerned about reports that these armed groups may be detaining civilians illegally. We regularly raise our concerns about human rights issues with the Sri Lankan Government as I did when I visited Sri Lanka on 10 November.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received that internally displaced persons attempting to return to their homes in Vavuniya and the Vanni in Sri Lanka have been killed by the army. [59662]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received no such reports.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding evidence of mass graves at Chemmani, Jaffna in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [59661]

Mr. Fatchett: We are deeply concerned about reports that several hundred bodies of people who "disappeared" in army custody in 1996–97 may be in a mass grave at Chemmani in Jaffna. This is a subject which I raised with the Sri Lankan authorities while I was in Colombo on 10 November. We have urged the Government of Sri Lanka to investigate these allegations fully and with the minimum of further delay.

International Criminal Tribunal (Former Yugoslavia)

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the investigations by the International Criminal Tribunal in Kosovo. [59483]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has conducted initial investigations in Kosovo following the announcement in July by Justice Arbour that in her view the conflict there falls within the Tribunal's mandate. Along with our EU Partners we have formally protested to the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia following their recent decision not to issue the necessary visas to Justice Arbour

and her officials to enable them to carry out further investigations in Kosovo. We have made it clear to Belgrade that their actions constitute non-compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1160, 1199 and 1203. We are supporting the adoption of a new UN Security Council Resolution demanding the full cooperation of the Federal Authorities with the ICTY. A draft resolution is currently being discussed in New York.

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment the Government have made of the compatibility of the Federal Government of Yugoslavia's refusal to grant a visa to the Chief Prosecutor of the UN War Crimes Tribunal with *(a)* the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1199 and *(b)* other UN Security Council resolutions; and if he will make a statement; [59650]

(2) what representations the Government have made, through the UN, concerning the refusal of the authorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to allow the Chief Prosecutor of the UN War Crimes Tribunal to investigate alleged Serbian atrocities in Kosovo. [59649]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Along with our EU Partners we have formally protested to the FRY Authorities following their recent decision not to issue the necessary visas to Justice Arbour and her officials to enable them to carry out further investigations in Kosovo. We have made it clear to Belgrade that we view their actions as non-compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1160, 1199 and 1203. We are also supporting the adoption of a new UN Security Council Resolution demanding the full cooperation of the FRY Authorities with the ICTY. A draft resolution is currently being discussed in New York.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what military matters concerning the Falkland Islands were raised by President Menem of Argentina during his official visit to the UK; and if he will make a statement. [59412]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: During their talks at 10 Downing Street, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister welcomed President Menem's commitment to reconciliation and his public renunciation of the use of force against the Falklands. President Menem raised our embargo on the export of arms and military equipment to Argentina. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister responded by saying that we would reappraise the embargo in a positive light, mindful of our security considerations. At present the embargo remains in place unchanged.

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received an official request from the Government of Argentina for talks on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement. [59410]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Government of Argentina have repeatedly called on us to enter into negotiations on sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. In response we have made it clear that the United Kingdom does not regard sovereignty over the Falklands as negotiable.

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place between Her Majesty's Government and the United Nations regarding initiating an agreement to set a date for the opening of talks between the UK and Argentina over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. [59413]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: No such discussions have taken place. We do not regard the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands as negotiable. Moreover, the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations at New York told the General Assembly on 22 September:

"we have no doubt about Britain's sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and the other British Dependencies in the South Atlantic".

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of comments by the President of Argentina following his official visit to the UK that he expects Argentina to be in talks with the UK about the future sovereignty of the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement. [59409]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Our position remains as I explained in my reply to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on 29 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *275*. We do not regard the sovereignty of the Falklands as negotiable. There will be no change in the status of the Islands unless that is the wish of the Islanders themselves.

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions were held by Her Majesty's Government on the Argentine claim to the Falkland Islands with President Menem of Argentina during his official visit to the UK. [59411]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We did not enter into any discussion on sovereignty over the Falkland Islands during the recent visit of President Menem. The President and his delegation reiterated to us the Argentine view on the Falklands. In response we made it clear that the UK does not regard its sovereignty over the Falklands as negotiable.

EC Documents

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of European Community documents are (i) not public documents and (ii) not publicly released as a matter of course though of an unrestricted nature. [59800]

Ms Quin: A number of European Community documents are automatically placed in the public domain, for example, Commission proposals, Council common positions and Council press releases. All other Council documents can be requested by the public under the conditions of Council Decision 93/731/EC of 20 December 1993. Equivalent arrangements exist for other institutions. All applications are treated on a case-by-case basis. In 1997, 2,431 Council documents were requested, of which 78.3 per cent. were released.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a list of requests for access to documents of the European Communities by members of the public which were not granted in 1997, together with the reasons for refusal. [59794]

Ms Quin: A review of implementation of Council Decision 93/731/EC on Public access to Council documents is produced every two years. This lists the statistics on requests for access to documents and the reasons for refusal. In 1997, requests were made for 2,431

documents and access was refused to 528 of these documents. Statistics on the invoking of reasons for refusal of access under Decisions 93/731 for 1996–97 are contained in the Council review, copies of which I am placing in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the establishment of a register of unrestricted European Community documents. [59801]

Ms Quin: During their Presidency in the first half of 1998, the UK Government pressed for a public register of Council documents (both European Community and European Union) to be established. We expect the register to be up and running at the beginning of 1999.

EC Proposals

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those proposals under consideration at European Community level intended for formal discussion after ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam, presently without treaty base. [59802]

Ms Quin: There are no legislative proposals currently being considered at Ministerial level which do not have an existing treaty base. Certain matters are being considered at working group level, however, to prepare for the implementation of the Amsterdam Treaty once it enters into force. These include preparations for the incorporation of the Schengen acquis, proposed common principles for European elections, and proposed measures to establish the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit for CFSP.

People's Europe '98

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason the European Movement was approached to help organise People's Europe '98. [59804]

Ms Quin: Decisions about the involvement of organisations in the People's Europe '98 conference were the responsibility of the organisers. We suggested to the organisers that a wide range of opinion should be represented.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the involvement of (i) the Confederation of British Industry, (ii) the Institute of Directors, (iii) the Federation of Small Businesses and (iv) the Forum of Private Business in People's Europe '98. [59803]

Ms Quin: Decisions about the involvement of representatives of civic society in the People's Europe '98 conference were the responsibility of the organisers. At our suggestion, the organisers sought to ensure that a wide range of opinion was represented, including non-governmental organisations, local government, trade unions, small business, youth organisations and academia.

Building Europe Together Programme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the publications under the Building Europe Together project and released in the United Kingdom. [59785]

Ms Quin: The following publications were produced under the European Commission's Building Europe Together programme: factsheets on some of the areas covered by the Amsterdam Treaty; and booklets entitled "The Citizen's Guide to the Treaty of Amsterdam" and "The Treaty of Amsterdam: Questions and Answers". All of these are available on the Internet. The booklets are available, only on request, from the Commission Representation in the UK.

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *33*, if he will request the Israeli Government to list the number of building permits issued for Jewish housing in East Jerusalem since 1994 indicating where building *(a)* has been completed, *(b)* is in progress and *(c)* has yet to start. [59556]

Mr. Fatchett: We have no exact figures but, according to the available information since February 1995 approximately 3,000 Jewish housing units have been built on confiscated land and a further 6,200 units are at various stages of the planning process. Of the latter, 6,000 are planned for Har Homa (Jebel Abu Ghneim), although tenders have been issued for only 1,025 units; 58 building permits have been issued on the Mount of Olives; and 70–130 units are planned for Ras al-Amoud, although these are not at a very advanced stage. We are unaware of any actual building underway on housing units in East Jerusalem this year: most of the activity has involved either paper exercises or the laying of infrastructure and erection of fences in preparation for building.

International Criminal Court

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to ratify the International Criminal Court Treaty. [59779]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We intend that the UK should be among the first sixty States to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Legislation will be necessary before we can proceed to ratification. We will introduce such legislation as soon as the Parliamentary timetable allows.

Sanjiv Kumar Nandra

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *530*, in respect of Sanjiv Kumar Nandra, ref IMM/ECR/98/S, when the Migration and Visa Correspondence Unit will write to the hon. Member for Leicester, East; on what date Mr. Sanjiv Kumar Nandra was interviewed in New Delhi; and when Mr. Sanjiv Kumar Nandra was expected to come to the United Kingdom following his interview in New Delhi. [59554]

Mr. Fatchett: The Migration and Visa Correspondence Unit wrote to my hon. Friend about this case on 27 May 1998. Mr. Sanjiv Kumar Nandra was interviewed in New Delhi on 29 May 1997. We have no knowledge of Mr. Sanjiv Kumar Nandra's intended dates of travel since such information is not normally provided with settlement applications.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59744]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We keep registers of births, marriages and deaths at British consulates abroad. Only Consular officers have access to the master registers kept at post but information from them can be supplied to bona fide applicants on request. Copies of these registers are transmitted annually to the Office for National Statistics, and indexes to them are then made generally available (to hon. Members and members of the public) at the Family Records Centre at 1 Myddleton Street, London, EC1.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59727]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department is currently providing 29 nursery places for children aged from 3 months to 5 years. In addition, holiday playschemes are available during school holidays. Parents pay an average of £83.50 per week for nursery places and £8.06 per day to holiday playschemes.

The FCO records information about childcare on a calendar year basis. In 1996, 155 staff used FCO childcare facilities. This number included members of the then Overseas Development Administration. This represented 1.85 per cent. of total staff in the FCO and ODA at that time.

In 1997, 50 parents used these facilities: some of them used the facilities for more than one child or in the case of the Holiday Playscheme on more than one occasion. This represented 0.7 per cent. of total FCO staff.

High Commissioners

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to ensure Her Majesty's Government's representatives abroad are of High Commissioner status in as many different Commonwealth countries as finances allow. [59569]

Mr. Fatchett: One of the main strategic aims of UK foreign policy is to strengthen the Commonwealth and improve the prosperity of its members. This is being taken into account in the current review of our global representation which will modernise our world-wide operations and ensure that staff and resources are deployed so as best to meet our objectives.

Jean Monnet Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the criteria for the selection of European centres of excellence as Jean Monnet projects. [59790]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available. The EC programme "Jean Monnet: European Integration in Universities" is implemented by the European Commission without direct involvement on the part of EU Member States; however, I advised that 23 per cent. of all Jean Monnet projects are UK led.

EU Information Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *205*, if he will place in the Library a financial breakdown by project of the information strategy for EU applicant countries; what criteria determine the selection of such projects; and what monitoring is undertaken by representatives of Her Majesty's Government. [59784]

Mr. Foulkes: I have been asked to reply.

Information on individual projects is held by the European Commission. I will place it in the Library as soon as possible.

The objectives of the programme are to promote understanding in Central and Eastern Europe of the EU's pre-accession strategy, the Europe Agreements and the role of Phare as the main financial instrument of the strategy, and more broadly to promote understanding of the EU and the implications of accession. Activities which meet these objectives are approved by the Commission for management by the Commission services or candidate country Governments.

Management and monitoring of the programme is carried out by the Commission. Member States receive a report on the activities of the previous year before approving commitments for the current year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Millennium Dome

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list the foreign-owned companies he has contacted in relation to providing financial backing to the Millennium Dome project; and if he will make a statement; [57981]

(2) if he will list the meetings he has had with the American company, McDonald's in his official capacities in relation to the Millennium Dome; and if he will make a statement. [57982]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 27 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *130.*

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the criteria which have been followed by the Millennium Experience Company when deciding which companies to approach in their efforts to attract private sector financial backing to the project; and if he will make a statement. [57984]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) sponsorship strategy aims to identify business and commercial sectors, and individual companies within those sectors, which have a potential affinity to the various components of the Dome. These components include the different exhibit zones and the linked National Programme of activities around the country. A further important consideration is the NMEC's overriding objective to ensure that sponsorship arrangements do not impact adversely on the integrity of the project as the national focus for the millennium celebrations.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the contacts the Millennium Experience Company has had with the American company, McDonald's; and if he will make a statement. [57983]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has been in discussion for some months with a number of major companies operating in the UK and elsewhere, including McDonald's. The unique nature of the sponsorship arrangements for the Millennium Experience project inevitably requires a series of meetings at officer and Director levels and such meetings have taken place between the NMEC and all committed and potential sponsors.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will detail the merchandising arrangements which have been agreed between the Millennium Experience Company and private sector financial backers; and if he will make a statement. [57985]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The Millennium Experience is not a trade show. Opportunities for sponsors to promote or sell their own products will be strictly controlled through contractual arrangements with the NMEC and these will ensure that the integrity of the project is not adversely affected.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make it his policy to publish, within one week of their agreement to commit funds, the identity of all new private sponsors of the Millennium Experience at Greenwich; [59232]

(2) if he will make it his policy to publish, within the week of their agreement at board level to commit funds, the identity of all new corporate sponsors of the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. [59233]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The timing of any announcements about sponsorship is a matter for negotiation between the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) and individual sponsors. Both the NMEC and its sponsors have operational and commercial considerations to take into account which will influence the timing of announcements.

However, association with the nation's unique focus for the millennium celebrations is something which I would expect all those who support it, financially or otherwise, to want to declare as soon as possible.

Communication Satellites

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will devise a strategy to deal with the possibility of communication satellite damage and its potential effects on the British economy; and if he will make a statement. [58548]

Mr. Battle: The responsibility for the safety of communications satellites lies in the first instance with the owners and operators of the satellites. This responsibility has been carried out admirably by inter-governmental organisations such as Intelsat, Eutelsat and Inmarsat and by the private sector for many years. The wider issue of space debris and its implications for satellite safety is a major concern of spacefaring nations. This is tackled by a number of international organisations as it is not feasible for any one country to develop a space debris strategy in isolation. The British National Space Centre works on this issue with its European Space Agency partners on the Space Debris Advisory Committee and at National Group meetings. The British National Space Centre also plays an active part in the Inter Agency Debris Committee and the United Nations Committee for the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Her Majesty's Government remain committed to an international approach to common space problems.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the delay in reaching agreement on the payment of compensation to those suffering from *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema. [58727]

Mr. Battle: On Vibration White Finger (VWF) discussions were held with the claimants' solicitors on 2 November where good progress was made towards reaching a final agreement on a scheme for compensating miners with VWF. Those present agreed a single medical assessment process for working out the degree of injury, and agreed that a pilot of these tests can begin on 1 December at our testing centre in Sheffield. We are working hard to establish whether full and final offers can be made to miners on the basis of existing medical reports

being sufficient evidence. The next meeting is scheduled for 30 November following a further exchange of information and proposals. I have given officials and advisers attending that meeting a mandate to progress negotiations to a rapid conclusion and, assuming the plaintiffs' solicitors act reasonably, I believe an agreement can now be reached with no further need to visit the courts. To reduce delays further, sets of medical assessment equipment have already been purchased and work has been done to identify organisations able to deliver these assessments.

With regard to chronic bronchitis and emphysema. The Plaintiff's Solicitors Group accepted my Department's suggestion to adjourn a High Court hearing scheduled for 6 November and, instead, held a meeting with officials where good progress was made to resolve the outstanding issues. It was agreed that the medical advisers from both sides should get together to discuss the outstanding medical issues. This meeting took place on 11 November. My understanding is that this discussion went well and should allow us and the plaintiffs' solicitors to get on with agreeing the arrangements for handling the many thousands of claims from miners or their widows. I am determined that a final agreement is reached as soon as possible. There will need to be a tendering process for the required medical services which will inevitably take time and we are considering ways to speed up that process. In the meantime we are looking at ways in which we can extend the offer of interim payments to other categories of claimants.

Commercial Debts

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been set aside in the current financial year to publicise the enactment of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. [59144]

Mrs. Roche: The Government are committed to tackling late payment and are working in partnership with the business community to improve the UK's payment culture. We are supporting the Better Payment Practice Campaign which is disseminating information about the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998.

To date £186,459 has been spent to support the campaign of which £40,000 has been contributed by the private sector. The total figure does not include staff time, or time given by Members of the Better Payment Practice Group, or other resources. The Government's contribution has paid for the production of a User's Guide to the Act and a dedicated web-site.

In addition individual trade and business organisations have publicised the Act through trade publications at no cost to Government.

Gas and Electricity Services

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to require providers of gas and electricity services to advertise their prices in a standard format. [59303]

Mr. Battle: This is a matter for Director General of Gas Supply and the Director General of Electricity Supply. However, I understand that OFGAS are consulting with suppliers and others to see whether it is possible to reach agreement on a simple means of presenting price information in a way which will enable customers straightforwardly to compare different companies' offers. I understand too that OFFER are considering a similar approach.

In addition, as I announced on 23 September, at my request the Association of Energy Suppliers, whose membership includes the majority of domestic gas and electricity suppliers, have recently clarified their code of practice on doorstep selling to ensure that all their sales representatives provide, on request, clear written information on prices.

Oil Production and Transportation

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates the Government have made in their environmental assessment of the volume of oil that might be transported by tanker from the trenches licensed for production in the Atlantic Frontier and the likely increase in the number of tankers as a result. [59376]

Mr. Battle: There are currently two oilfields, Foinaven and Schiehallion, producing from the Atlantic Frontier with combined reserves of approximately 700 million barrels of oil. Both fields use shuttle-tanker export for produced oil and the shuttle-tanker frequency for both fields is one return journey every five days or so. Over the next twenty years we anticipate approximately 1,000 return shuttle-tanker journeys to deplete Foinaven and Schiehallion.

Any new oil developments in this area will be treated on a case-by-case basis in the light of existing and potential infrastructure provision and will be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment process.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of electricity produced in the last year for which figures are available came from renewable sources. [58716]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* In 1997 electricity generated from renewable sources accounted for just over 2 per cent. of total UK electricity generation. Through the contracts granted under NFFO-5 and previous NFFO rounds, taken with existing large hydro capacity, that figure is expected to rise to 5 per cent. by about 2003. We have set ourselves the target of achieving a figure of 10 per cent. by 2010.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated concerning the effect on employment of increasing spending on Government research and development on renewable energy. [59773]

Mr. Battle: My Department has not commissioned specific work in this area, but the UK renewables industry is currently estimated to employ around 3,500 people directly. Some of these jobs have resulted from the DTI's New and Renewable Energy Programme and the EPSRC's parallel R&D programme, but the majority have been created as a result of contracts placed with suppliers of electricity from renewable sources under the Government's Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation. If spending on R&D in this area were increased as a result of the current

review of policy on renewable energy then we might expect to see a modest increase in jobs in the industry, research organisations and consultancies.

The development and deployment of renewables is likely to lead to further job opportunities. The EU White Paper on Renewables estimates that a doubling of the proportion of the Community's energy to come from renewables to 12 per cent. would create at least 500,000 jobs in the EU by 2020.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when the review of renewable energy sources is to be published; [59769]

(2) if the review of renewable energy sources will consider longer term and higher targets than the present one; [59770]

(3) if the review of renewable energy sources will consider whether electricity supply companies should be obliged to purchase a certain percentage from renewable sources; [59771]

(4) what estimate he has made of the extent to which the target of 10 per cent. of electricity from renewable sources could be met from offshore wind energy alone. [59772]

Mr. Battle: As part of the renewables policy review my Department is examining what contribution new and renewable energy technologies could make in the UK, what role UK industry might have in home and export markets, and the contribution renewables could make in achieving our national and international commitments for greenhouse gas reductions. I am looking at both the timescale to 2010, and laying the foundation for an expanding contribution in the longer term. I expect to make an announcement about the review later this year.

To achieve an aim of 10% electricity from renewables would require 3–4 Gigawatts (GW) DNC (Declared Net Capacity) of additional renewable capacity beyond that secured under the current NFFO arrangements. It would require significant contribution from wastes, including landfill gas; onshore wind; offshore wind; and energy crops. Small scale hydro could also be expected to continue making a smaller but important contribution. Decisions on the proportions that these technologies might contribute to meeting a 10% target would be made progressively in the light of experience and further developments in the market.

Under the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Public Electricity Suppliers are already required to buy a defined amount of electricity generated by renewable sources. We are also working with renewable energy generators to encourage them to take advantage of the liberalised market and to take up the opportunity for 'green electricity' trading.

The renewables policy review will reflect the outcome of our current consultation on the future of gas and electricity regulation. Our proposals for the future of regulation are contained in "A Fair Deal for Consumers; Modernising the Framework for Utility Regulation" and include separate licensing arrangements for electricity supply and distribution, new electricity trading arrangements. We are considering in parallel how NFFO might be adapted to the new circumstances.

Export Licences (Sri Lanka)

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused for the export of military equipment to Sri Lanka since June. [59509]

Mrs. Roche: The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating.

The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained. Between 1 June and 16 October 1998, 23 individual licences were issued covering the export to consignees or end-users in Sri Lanka of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, the so-called Military List: 15 standard individual export licences (SIELs) and 8 open individual export licences (OIELs). In the same period, no applications for such SIELs or OIELs were refused. Individual licences may cover a range of goods with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the Table in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

Individual licences issued between 1 June and 16 October 1998 covering the export to Sri Lanka of goods on the Military List

Rating	*Number of SIELs issued covering goods with this rating*	*Number of OIELs issued covering goods with this rating*
ML1	2	0
ML2	1	0
ML3	2	0
ML4	2	0
ML5	1	0
ML10	1	2
ML11	4	4
ML13	1	1
ML15	1	1

This information should be considered in light of my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

This information does not cover any Media OIELs that may have been issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

In addition, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Sri Lanka under certain Open General Export Licences; copies of all Open General Export Licences valid at any time during the period are in the Library of the House.

Radio Advertising

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce the results of wealth warnings on radio advertising; and if he will make a statement. [59491]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* I am considering the responses received to the consultation on wealth warnings on radio advertising. I will announce my decision shortly.

Radiation-Induced Illness

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what compensation has been paid by nuclear companies to those suffering from radiation-induced illness in each of the past 10 years. [59613]

Mr. Battle: The UK civil nuclear industry (BNFL, BNFL Magnox Generation Group, UKAEA, Nuclear Electric Ltd., Scottish Nuclear Ltd. and Urenco (Capenhurst) Ltd.) plus MOD, the Atomic Weapons Establishment and Devonport and Rosyth Dockyards and all civil and military nuclear associated trade unions have a voluntary scheme for determining compensation due to employees or former employees who develop radiation-linked diseases. Between the introduction of the Scheme in 1982 and the end of 1997, compensation payments have been awarded in 75 cases with over £3¼ million in compensation being paid. Details on the number and totals of compensation payments made in each of the past ten years are as follows:

Year	Awards	Total amount of compensation paid (£)	Participants
1988	2	39,337	BNFL (1982), UKAEA (1987)
1989	2	51,267	
1990	3	115,431	
1991	4	136,346	
1992	7	378,002	
1993	5	110,088	Nuclear Electric, Scottish Nuclear, BNFL/Magnox Generation Group and URENCO (Capenhurst) join
1993	[1]4	192,633	
1994	20	1,011,746	MOD and AWE join
1995	6	257,920	
1996	10	341,946	
1996	10	341,946	
1997	1	20,000	Devonport and Rosyth docklands join
1997	[1]1	21,244	

[1] Following changes in the method of technical assessment, this led to a subsequent re-analysis of past claims. Further compensation was awarded to five pre-1991 cases.

Since 1995 the employers and unions from the organisations participating in the Scheme agreed that, in order to protect the identification of individual claimants, information on successful claims will be provided only for the compensation scheme as a whole. Details on the compensation scheme payments have therefore been contained in an Annual Press Statement from the Compensation Scheme for Radiation Linked Diseases. I am arranging for copies of the annual statements for 1995, 1996 and 1997 to be placed in the Library of the House. I understand that the annual statement for 1998 is to be published shortly and I will arrange for copies of this statement to be similarly placed.

Japanese Vehicles

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the likely increase in *(a)* the number of Japanese vehicles imported and *(b)* the increase in market share of Japanese imports in the UK car market when the voluntary restraint agreement on imports is lifted. [59462]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* I welcome the opening of the car market that will occur when the voluntary restraint agreement between Japan and the European Union expires in 1999. I have not estimated what difference this will make to import volumes and market share.

Industrial Policy

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the current objectives of the Government's industrial policy; and if he will make statement. [58845]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Government's objectives for the improvement of business competitiveness will be set out in the forthcoming Competitiveness white paper.

Dounreay

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on *(a)* current reprocessing contracts at Dounreay, *(b)* future reprocessing contracts at Dounreay and *(c)* future reprocessing contracts at Dounreay involving processed fuel. [59925]

Mr. Battle: On 5 June 1998, the Government announced that they had accepted UKAEA's recommendation that it should accept no new commercial reprocessing contracts at Dounreay and would end reprocessing once its committed commercial business and own spent fuel liabilities had been completed. In answer to a question following the announcement, 5 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *385–86*, UKAEA provided details of Dounreay's reprocessing contracts to the House of Commons library and also to the Trade and Industry Committee's inquiry into Georgian nuclear material.

The Fuel Cycle Area at Dounreay is currently shut down following the Health and Safety Executive's direction to halt operations after the loss of electrical supplies in May 1998 and will restart only when HSE is satisfied it is safe to do so.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59723]

Dr. Howells: Departmental staff in central London have access to a 32-place holiday playscheme for a minimum of 54 days each academic year. Staff contribute £7.50 per day per place towards the £16.17 daily fee.

From this year DTI staff in Cardiff have access to a local holiday playscheme for a contribution of £6.50 to the £13.00 daily fee per place. An annual contribution is also made towards the costs of an inter-Departmental Easter and Summer playscheme for staff in Government Office for the East Midlands.

Approximately 100 staff used the central London playscheme in 1996–97, rising to 189 staff (about 6 per cent. of London-based HQ staff) in 1997–98. In 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively 11 and 9 staff in the Government Office for the East Midlands used the local playscheme facilities.

In addition, the Department offers a range of other family friendly policies to help staff balance their work and family lives including flexible working hours, part time working, 5 days' paid paternity leave, paid leave for domestic emergencies and career breaks.

Manchester United Takeover Report

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he expects the MMC report on the proposed BSkyB takeover of Manchester United to be published before the conclusion of the Restrictive Practices Court inquiry into the BSkyB/BBC/Premier League television arrangements. [59935]

Dr. Howells: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) are due to deliver their report on BSkyB's proposed bid for Manchester United to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by 12 March 1999. The report will be published as soon as possible thereafter.

The proceedings issued by the Director General of Fair Trading in the Restrictive practices Court concerning the Premier League's collective selling of clubs' broadcasting rights, and the exclusive nature of restrictions in agreements with broadcasters on televising of such rights, will commence on 11 January 1999.

My right hon. Friend has no role in the proceedings or in the decision which will be taken by the Court. I cannot comment on whether the MMC's report will be published before the conclusion of the Court's inquiry.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the proportion of his Department's computer systems which will be millennium-compliant on 1 April 1999. [58890]

Mr. Mandelson: On current plans all of the Department's business critical computer systems will have been corrected, fully tested and put back into use by 1 April 1999. The target date for completion of work on non-business critical computer systems is the end of July 1999.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many bug busters have completed their training and started work on the millennium date change problem; and what estimate he has made of the number that will be in place by *(a)* 1 January 1999, *(b)* 1 April 1999, *(c)* 1 July 1999, *(d)* 1 October 1999 and *(e)* 1 January 2000. [58983]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* I have been asked to reply.

We expect 20,000 to have undertaken training as a result of our initiative in line with our target. Already 1,547 have completed or booked on to courses and we are actively encouraging small businesses to take up the place on offer.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59737]

Mr. Mandelson: The following registers are held by my Department, its Executive Agencies, and the related bodies as indicated:

Register of Companies

Register of Overseas Companies

Register of Unregistered Companies

Register of Open-ended Investment Companies

The European Economic Interest Grouping

Register of Disqualified Directors

Register of Limited Partnerships

Register of Newspapers

Register of Patents

Register of Designs

Register of Trade Marks

Register of Space Objects

Register of Licences and Orders under Section 35 of the Coal Industry Act 1994 (Coal Authority)

Register under Section 49 of the Electricity Act 1989 (D-G of Electricity Supply)

Register of Nuclear Site Licences

Register under Section 36 of the Gas Act 1986 (D-G of Gas Supply)

Registers under Sections 19 and 23 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 (OFTEL)

Register of Appeals under the Approval of Safety Standards Regulations 1987

Register of Appeals under the Gas Appliances (Safety) Regulations 1989

Register of Deeds of Arrangements

Bankruptcy Register.

All of the registers listed above are open to both hon. Members and members of the public.

Grants (West Midlands Companies)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the value of grants awarded to *(a)* inward investors, *(b)* existing indigenous UK companies and *(c)* new indigenous companies, in the last year for which figures are available, for each constituency in the West Midlands. [59544]

Mrs. Roche: The following figures show the value of Regional Selective Assistance grants offered in the West Midlands Assisted Area in the year to 31 March 1998 to foreign owned companies, existing indigenous UK companies and new indigenous companies by constituency.

(a) Foreign Owned Companies:

Constituency	*Number of offers*	*Amount Offered* £
Birmingham Erdington	1	95,000
Birmingham Selly Oak	1	750,000
Birmingham Sparkbrook	1	1,650,000
Coventry South East	1	200,000
Coventry South West	2	1,800,000
Dudley East	1	200,000
North Warwickshire	1	22,500,000

(a) Foreign Owned Companies:

Constituency	Number of offers	Amount Offered £
Nuneaton	1	30,000
South East Staffordshire	1	500,000
Sutton Coldfield	1	1,100,000
Walsall North	1	45,000
Warley West	1	30,000
Wolverhampton North East	1	94,000
Total	14	28,994,000

(b) Existing indigenous UK companies:

Constituency	Number of offers	Amount offered £
Aldridge-Brownhills	1	65,000
Birmingham Erdington	3	53,500
Birmingham Hodge Hill	2	75,000
Birmingham Ladywood	10	342,000
Birmingham Perry Barr	1	40,000
Birmingham Selly Oak	1	50,000
Birmingham Small Heath	12	768,000
Birmingham Sparkbrook	8	128,000
Birmingham Yardley	2	215,000
Cannock and Burntwood	2	25,000
Coventry North East	2	110,000
Coventry North West	2	220,000
Coventry South East	1	60,000
Dudley East	4	54,000
Dudley West	2	22,000
Halesowen and Stourbridge	3	71,000
Mid Staffordshire	1	75,000
Mid Worcestershire	1	35,000
North Warwickshire	6	110,000
Nuneaton	2	160,000
Solihull	1	70,000
South East Staffordshire	4	79,000
South Staffordshire	2	40,000
Stratford-On-Avon	1	50,000
Walsall North	3	42,000
Walsall South	4	238,000
Warley East	2	85,000
Warley West	5	454,000
West Bromwich East	2	40,000
West Bromwich West	6	118,000
Wolverhampton North East	7	192,000
Wolverhampton South East	7	625,000
Wolverhampton South West	1	25,000
Total	111	4,736,500

(c) New indigenous companies:

Constituency	Number of offers	Amount offered £
Birmingham Ladywood	1	20,000
Coventry North East	1	90,000
Coventry South East	1	25,000
Mid Worcestershire	1	15,000
South East Staffordshire	2	16,000
Walsall North	2	17,000

(c) New indigenous companies:

Constituency	Number of offers	Amount offered £
Wolverhampton North East	1	25,000
Wolverhampton South East	1	30,000
Total	10	238,000

National Minimum Wage

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans he has to help businesses overcome problems relating to new regulations as a result of the introduction of the national minimum wage; [59860]

(2) what effort he is making to overcome the fears of the business community of being overloaded by new regulations at the introduction of the national minimum wage next year. [59859]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We have based our approach to the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 and the draft Regulations on the Better Regulation Unit's five key criteria of transparency, accountability, targeting, consistency and proportionality. We consulted and involved the business community at all stages and will provide detailed guidance for employers once the Regulations have been approved by Parliament.

Assisted Area Status (Coastal Resorts)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which coastal resorts have assisted area status. [59838]

Mrs. Roche: There is no single definitive list of coastal resorts.

In England, the current Assisted Areas map in coastal areas covers part or all of the coasts of the following counties or former counties: Merseyside, Lancashire, Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham, Cleveland, North Yorkshire, Humberside, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Essex, Kent, East Sussex, the Isle of Wight, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. In Wales, the current coverage includes part or all of the coasts of the following unitary authorities: Newport, Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Denbighshire and Flintshire. In Scotland the coverage includes part or all of the coasts of the following unitary authorities: Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, Inverclyde, Argyll and Bute, Highland, the Western Isles, Moray, Angus, Fife.

Car Prices

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the impact of *(a)* 10 per cent. and *(b)* 15 per cent. reduction in new car prices on the (i) revenue and (ii) profits of United Kingdom-based car manufacturers. [59566]

Mr. Mandelson: The revenue and profits of businesses are influenced by a range of factors, of which the price of the product is only one. I do not therefore propose to make such an estimate.

Car Imports

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate his Department has made of the likely increase in car imports into the United Kingdom by *(a)* volume and *(b)* market share if the present restrictions on non-EU imports are lifted. [59565]

Mr. Mandelson: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport is currently engaged in public consultation on the future of the Single Vehicle Approval scheme under which cars which are not made to European Type Approval standards are admitted into the UK. In doing so he will take account of the views of all affected industry and consumer interests on the effect of the arrangements and the proposed changes to them, including the effect on import levels.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate the Government have made of the likely change in car prices to personal customers in the United Kingdom if *(a)* the restrictions on non-EU imports are lifted and *(b)* the present exclusive franchise system of distribution is scrapped. [59567]

Mr. Mandelson: As far as the changes to the Single Vehicle Approval scheme are concerned, I refer the right hon. Member to my answer of Official Report, column 433.

The system of distributing and selling new cars through franchised dealers appointed by manufacturers is common to all the world's leading car markets. The European Commission is to review its operation in 2000, and in doing so will review the benefit the consumer receives from the system. The Government supports this approach.

Overseas Trade Fairs and Seminars

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the support available from his Department to assist United Kingdom businesses participating in overseas trade fairs and seminars; and which trade fairs, seminars and outward missions his Department will support in the year 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000. [60317]

Mr. Mandelson: On 16 December 1997 and 25 March 1998 the then Minister for Trade announced details of the new Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad scheme (SESA) for all events taking place from 1 April 1999. The scheme is based on wide consultation with business and recommendations of the Export Forum and its main features include:

a combined scheme covering both trade fairs and seminars,

assistance for new exporters to become established in markets abroad,

help for smaller groups in niche sectors and difficult markets, and

help for experienced exporters entering new target markets.

The simplified grant structure has a ceiling of £2,300 per participant with an additional supplement for those taking part in events in the emerging target markets identified by the Export Forum.

A copy of an Overview of the SESA scheme will be placed in the Library of the House.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade announced on 12 October our programme for supporting trade fairs and seminars abroad, and outward missions. I will place lists of the events in the Library of the House. Organisations that bid for support have already been informed.

Unsolicited Communications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he proposes to take to deal with unsolicited direct marketing faxes and calls; and if he will make a statement. [60316]

Mrs. Roche: Unsolicited direct marketing faxes and phone calls can be a real source of annoyance and an invasion of privacy, and the Government take these problems seriously. We will be dealing with them in forthcoming Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 which will implement the Telecommunications Data Protection Directive (97/66/EC).

The DTI has carried out a wide consultation on draft Regulations with both business and consumer interests. We are now revising the Regulations in the light of comments received and hope, before the end of this year, to make and lay Regulations before Parliament. In accordance with the Directive, these will ban unsolicited direct marketing faxes from being sent to any private individual or sole trader in the UK, as well as to any partnership in England and Wales. The Regulations will also establish an "opt-out" scheme for corporate subscribers who do not wish to receive such faxes. A similar "opt-out" scheme will enable individuals to avoid receiving unsolicited direct marketing calls.

Our intention is to bring the Regulations into force as soon as is practicable next year, bearing in mind the need to ensure that an effective mechanism is set in place so that the "opt-out" schemes can deliver the level of protection required. We will also take into account the need to allow sufficient time for industry to establish its compliance systems.

The Government previously stated that they intended the draft Regulations to come into force on the same date as the Data Protection Act 1998. In his written answer of 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *58*, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), announced that, because of the need to prepare and consult on substantial subordinate legislation, the Government now hoped to bring the Data Protection Act 1998 into force in the second quarter of next year. We do not anticipate that this will affect the timing of the Regulations dealing with unsolicited direct marketing calls and faxes.

Nuclear Industry Expenditure

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the amount of money spent in the last financial year by *(a)* BNFL, *(b)* Atomic Energy Authority Technology, *(c)* UKAEA and *(d)* NIREX on (i) public relations, (ii) educational materials for schools (iii) information materials for parliamentarians and (iv) advertising. [60007]

Mr. Battle: This is a matter for the companies concerned. I have asked the Chief Executive of BNFL, the Chairman of UKAEA and the Managing Director of NIREX to write to my hon. Friend providing these details. AEA Technology is a company in the private sector.

Energy Policy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the current reviews and consultations being carried out by his Department on energy policy. [59994]

Mr. Battle: My Department is currently reviewing its policies and programmes with respect to support for new and renewable sources of energy. We have reviewed our policy with respect to support for clean coal technology, and set out our broad aims in the White Paper *Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation* (Cm 4071), but the detail of the programme is still under consideration. Energy Papers setting out the details of both these programmes will be published shortly.

In addition, following up the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation, the Department is leading a Steering Committee which will take forward work on the recommendations made during that review by Merz and McLellan on electricity system security, and is working closely with OFFER to develop and implement the new trading arrangements for electricity which will replace the current Pool.

Congress of Europe

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons he attended the 50th Anniversary of the Congress of Europe; at what cost; and at whose invitation. [60003]

Mr. Wilson: I attended and addressed the 50th Anniversary of the Congress of Europe on behalf of the UK Presidency, at the invitation of the Secretary General of the European Movement. The cost was £640.00.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Food Standards Agency to be operational. [58273]

Mr. Rooker: The Government remain committed to setting up a Food Standards Agency, but I cannot anticipate the Queen's Speech.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Syms: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Meat Hygiene Service on advertising for and recruitment of vets in each European Union country. [58499]

Mr. Rooker: For the financial year 1998–99 to date, the Department and the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) have spent the following on advertising and recruitment for vets in the following European Union countries:

£ (rounded)

Country	*Department*	*MHS*
UK	2,200	3,564
Eire	650	650
France	—	3,400
Germany	—	430
Italy	—	1,480
Spain	—	6,000

Badgers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what sums he has expended in efforts to produce an effective vaccine against TB in badgers. [59033]

Mr. Rooker: Work on the development of a vaccine to prevent TB in badgers began in 1994. By the end of the financial year 1998–99, £1.96 million will have been spent. Following the recommendations in the Krebs Report, the focus of vaccine research has changed from badgers to cattle, but development work which is taking place at present is of value to both.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what differences exist between the study area and adjacent areas as regards the prevalence of tuberculosis in badgers. [59035]

Mr. Rooker: At the Central Science Laboratory's study area at Woodchester Park in Gloucestershire the annual prevalence of bovine tuberculosis excretion in badgers varied between 0.5 per cent. and 5.7 per cent. between 1981 and 1995. The badger population outside the study area has not been systematically investigated.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what conclusions he has reached as to *(a)* the amount of tuberculosis transmission between adult male badgers, transmission from mother to juveniles when suckling and aerosol infection between sow and young in setts and *(b)* the possibility of eradicating tuberculosis in badgers and keeping them clear of further infection. [59034]

Mr. Rooker: There are no quantitative data on the relative contributions made by each of the methods of transmission mentioned at *(a)*. We currently have insufficient information to say whether eradication of TB in badgers may be possible. The Department's research programme and the survey and other information gained during the randomised trial are vital to improve our understanding of how to control the disease in the longer term.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has made of *(a)* the number of badgers in England and Wales, *(b)* the highest and lowest densities per square kilometre and *(c)* the incidence of tuberculosis in those populations. [59036]

Mr. Rooker: With respect to part *(a)* of this question, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *252*. The highest badger density data published is 25 adults per square kilometre at the

Woodchester Park study area in Gloucestershire. In marginal habitats, densities as low as two badgers per kilometre have been recorded by researchers. The incidence of TB in badgers has not been systematically investigated outside the Woodchester Park study area.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme (Northamptonshire)

Ms Keeble: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the pieces of land in Northamptonshire to which public access has been announced under the voluntary code which are part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. [58778]

Mr. Morley: There are 42 agreements under which land managers receive payments under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for providing access to land in Northamptonshire. The list is published in the Ministry's Conservation Walks Register. I have placed an extract from the Register covering the county of Northamptonshire in the Library of the House. Details are also available on the MAFF website.

Food Labelling

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress made in the programme to label *(a)* meat and *(b)* other produce with the country of origin; and when he expects such labelling to begin. [59347]

Mr. Rooker: Rules on the labelling of food products are harmonised in the EC. Generally, the place of origin of any food must be given if omitting it could mislead the purchaser about the true place of origin of the food.

More specifically, fresh fruit and vegetables covered by EC marketing standards regulations are required to be marked with the country of origin at all points of sale. Under the Beef Labelling Scheme, any beef labelled with country of origin information must derive from animals born, reared and slaughtered in that country. National origin labelling of beef will become compulsory from the year 2000. The labels on pre-packaged poultrymeat must give an indication of its country of origin when it is imported from outside the Community and we are currently taking steps to require this information on labels, tickets or notices near where unpackaged poultry is offered for sale.

Separately, members of the British Retail Consortium have recently given a voluntary undertaking not to sell imported beef, lamb and pig meat, processed in the UK, under a British label. This is a welcome commitment, for UK producers and consumers alike.

Imported Beef

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the results of the consultation on whether the same restrictions on removing the central nervous system and specified bovine materials should apply to imported beef as are placed upon domestic animals. [59447]

Mr. Rooker: The Specified Risk Material Order 1997 prohibits the import into Great Britain of specified risk material (as defined therein), including the brains and spinal cords of bovine animals more than 6 months old and sheep and goats more than 12 months old. The Order also prohibits the importation of beef and a range of other animal products unless they are accompanied at the time of import by a certificate issued by the veterinary authorities in the country of origin confirming that they do not contain and were not derived from specified risk material.

The Order came into force on 1 January 1998, following the European Commission's decision on 16 December 1997 to defer the application of EU-wide measures to control the use of specified risk materials. The Government took the view that the interim safeguard measures in the Order, which complemented the controls on specified risk material derived from animals slaughtered in the UK, were necessary to protect public health. The provisions of the Order were notified to a large number of interested individuals, companies and organisations in writing and in a meeting prior to its entry into force but no formal consultation exercise was carried out.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59714]

Mr. Morley: In accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, no registers are limited to inspection by hon. Members only. The following registers are open for inspection by both hon. Members and the public, subject to some restrictions where indicated.

Register	*Comments*
The Conservation Walks Register	Provides details of access agreements under the agri-environment regulations
The Cattle Tracing System	Held in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) 820/97. The system includes details of holdings where cattle are kept in Great Britain and certain details of cattle, including where cattle registered onto the system after 28 September 1998 have been throughout their lives. Information can be made available to members of the public with a legitimate interest, under the terms of a Code of Practice.
List of Hygiene Assessment System scores for all individual licensed abattoirs and cutting plants in the UK	Published each month in a supplement to the Meat Hygiene Enforcement Report available free of charge from 0171–238–6498. Also provides a list of all licensed slaughterhouses and cutting plants in the UK.

Register	*Comments*
Register of abattoirs and cutting plants authorised to remove spinal cord from sheep over 12 months of age	List of premises authorised available on the MAFF interest site at http://www.maff.gov.uk/animalh/bse/index/html
Register of meat plants licensed or approved in England under meat hygiene legislation	This information is made available to the public on request and notified to the European Commission and other Member States (there is no specific legislative requirement to provide public access). Arrangements are also being made for this information to be available on the Internet in future.
Register of establishments approved to export meat, meat products etc. derived from foreign origin bovines	In compliance with Article 9(1) of Council Decision 98/256/EC.
Register of premises in other countries which are approved to export meat and certain animal products to the UK or EU	This information is made available to the public on request and notified to the European Commission and other Member States (there is no specific legislative requirement to provide public access).
Register of premises producing certain products of animal origin not included elsewhere	This information is made available to the public on request and notified to the European Commission and other Member States (there is no specific legislative requirement to provide public access).
Register of establishments or undertakings carrying on activities licensed, approved or registered under the Diseases of Animals (Waste Food) Order 1973 and the Animal By-Products Order 1992	In accordance with the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994.
Register of laboratories approved to test samples of milk for the presence of brucellosis or enzootic bovine leukosis	—
Register of authorised quarantine premises in Great Britain which are open to the public for the purpose of detaining imported rabies susceptible animals	—
Register of authorised carrying agents in Great Britain which are available to the public for the purpose of carrying imported rabies susceptible animals	—
Register of classification (by level of microbiological contamination) of designated bivalve mollusc production areas in England and Wales	Held in accordance with the Shellfish Hygiene Directive (91/492/EEC) as implemented by the Food Safety (Fishery Products and Live Shellfish) (Hygiene) Regulations 1998.
Register of Applications for Licences to Deposit Substances and Articles in the Sea and licences issued under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 (Part II) (as amended)	—
Register of Oil Spill Treatment Products Approved for Use in the United Kingdom for Treating Oil on the Surface of the Sea	—
Register of the pesticide study reports accessed by members of the public and others, with the names and addresses of inquirers	—
Country, Parish Holding (CPH) Register	This is not a public access database but some information is made available in certain circumstances
Registers of commercial and noncommercial interests of members of the: Food Advisory Committee Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee MAFF Consumer Panel Advisory Committee on Pesticides Veterinary Products Committee	—

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what child care provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this child care; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59716]

Mr. Morley: The demand for child care provision for members of staff is regularly reviewed in MAFF and its Agencies through staff surveys.

The Ministry and some of its Agencies provide both subsidised nursery places and holiday play schemes for staff with children, where these can be justified by a sound business case. Some of these are in facilities shared with other organisations.

Nursery places available to MAFF and Agency staff:

1 April 1996: 80

1 April 1997: 120

1 April 1998: 130.

At 1 April 1998 costs to parents for full time places varied between £50 and £90 a week, reflecting local costs, facilities and value for money.

Holiday play schemes have been made available to staff at ten Ministry and Agency locations throughout the country over the period from 1 April 1996 to 1 April 1998. Daily costs to parents during 1997–98 varied between £4.50 and £9.

The number of parents who benefit from these child care facilities is usually greater than the number of places available because of turnover, availability of part time places and the option to use holiday play schemes for only part of a holiday.

Child care provision is only one of the family friendly measures and arrangements available to staff in MAFF and its Agencies. Others include: flexible and part time working, career breaks, special leave for domestic emergencies, and paternity and maternity leave on full pay.

BSE

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the amount of money his Department has spent in Staffordshire on measures relating to the BSE problem; and if he will make a statement. [59545]

Mr. Morley: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the publications in which his Department has taken advertisements to publicise the millennium bug and indicate the cost of these advertisements; [59562]

(2) if he will list the publications in which his Department has placed advertisements to publicise the millennium bug, indicating the cost of the advertisements. [59910]

Mr. Morley: The Government are taking action centrally, primarily through Action 2000, to ensure that businesses are aware of the potential threat of the Millennium bug. My Department is in close contact with the farming and food industries to reinforce the message. We have not so far considered it appropriate to take out any direct advertisements.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate he has made of the susceptibility to the millennium bug of farm machinery and equipment in the United Kingdom; and what measures he proposes to take to deal with the problem; [59563]

(2) what steps he has taken to ensure that the operation of farm machinery in the UK is not affected by the millennium bug. [59909]

Mr. Morley: Farmers, like other businessmen, use a wide range of machinery and equipment, some of which may be susceptible to the Millennium bug. My Department is working closely with the NFU and others to ensure that farmers are aware of the potential for disruption to their businesses and of the action they can take to avoid this. Questions of equipment safety are, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52700]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The term research covers a wide range of activities from scientific and engineering research through to consultancies and public opinion surveys. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

New-variant CJD

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent his Department has recorded which of the known new-variant CJD victims were previously blood donors; if he will publish the information his Department has collated on this matter; and if he will take steps to trace and destroy blood retained by the Blood Transfusion Service from these individuals. [59982]

Ms Jowell: Cases of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease are reported to the CJD Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh which informs the United Kingdom blood services. Four such cases have been notified and steps have been taken to trace and withdraw components or products from the donation, as a precautionary measure whenever this has been possible.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what screening tests are currently available for new-variant CJD; [59985]

(2) what efforts his Department is making to develop a test for new-variant CJD. [59984]

Ms Jowell: There are no screening tests for new variant CJD (nvCJD) currently available. The diagnosis can be confirmed only by direct examination of brain tissue.

The development of efficient diagnostic techniques for CJD was identified in the Government's strategy for research relating to the human health aspects of Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs) published in November 1996. Efficient diagnostic

techniques are vital to the assessment of disease mechanisms, to diagnosing the presence of the disease in a patient and to epidemiological surveillance.

The Department is currently funding the Public Health Laboratory Service for two specific projects in this regard. One project is aimed at the development of panels of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) for the evaluation of tests for CJD, and the other is aimed at the development of a sensitive and specific test for the detection of abnormal Prion Protein in blood and urine samples.

A complete list of Government funded research on diagnostic tests for TSEs is available on the Medical Research Council's Website at http://www.mrc.ac.uk/tse_tb2.htm.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the risk of transmitting new-variant CJD by blood transfusion. [59980]

Ms Jowell: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee considered all available risk assessments in June 1998. Following this the Committee recommended that the Government should extend the use of leucodepletion for all blood destined for transfusion as soon as practically possible to reduce the theoretical risk of transmission of new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the risk of infection by new-variant CJD posed to close blood line relatives of the known new-variant CJD victims. [59979]

Ms Jowell: There is no scientific evidence to suggest that patients with new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease pose any risk of transmitting the infection to close blood line relatives.

Blood (Leucodepletion)

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has evaluated on the leucodepletion of blood within the Blood Transfusion Service. [59991]

Ms Jowell: The Department has considered all the published research on leucodepletion. The National Blood Authority and the Department are currently carrying out further research on the effects of leucodepletion, which will be evaluated when completed. The need for further research will be assessed.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the conclusions of the National Blood Authority to be published with regard to the leucodepletion of blood within the blood transfusion service. [59981]

Ms Jowell: In July 1998, on advice of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, the National Blood Authority was instructed to implement the leucodepletion of all blood. This process will be completed by next autumn.

Carers (Specialist Equipment)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance his Department makes available to carers for the purchase of specialist equipment. [58391]

Mr. Hutton: Carers do not directly receive money to purchase specialist equipment. The Government's objective in providing equipment to disabled and older people is to help them live as fully and independently as possible, ensuring that service providers make practical support for carers a high priority. In 1996/97, the latest year for which figures are available, the National Health Service and social services spent a combined figure of approximately £250 million on the provision of disability equipment, excluding home adaptions. Expenditure on Disabled Facilities Grants by housing authorities was £95 million.

Paramedics

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received relating to setting up a statutory body to inspect qualifications and training procedures for paramedics; and if he will make a statement. [59899]

Mr. Milburn: The Ambulance Service Association is responsible for the provision and management, including certification and assessment arrangements, of the current system of national awards for ambulance and paramedical personnel. The Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine considers petitions for state registration. We understand that a petition in respect of paramedics was submitted by the Ambulance Service Association to the Council on 12 October 1998 and will be submitted to the Government shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 17 November 1998

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Sandford Rectory

Mrs. Browning: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if the Church Commissioners have transferred since 1968 the trust owning Sandford Rectory, Devon to *(a)* other trustees and *(b)* other parties. [60200]

Mr. Stuart Bell: No. Since 1930 the property has been vested in the incumbent of the benefice of Sandford with Upton Hellions by virtue of his office.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Law Lords

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the *(a)* total number and *(b)* percentage of currently active law lords who have professional experience of (i) human rights work and (ii) commercial law. [59601]

Mr. Hoon: All sitting Law Lords have such experience.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parole

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responses he has received to the consultation document "Improving Parole Decision Making"; and how he intends to proceed with the proposal to delegate authority in parole cases involving prisoners with determinate sentences of between four and 15 years. [60440]

Mr. Straw: The consultation period ended on 4 November 1998. We have received 38 responses to the paper: 33 supported the proposals in the paper in their entirety; five others offered differing degrees of support. Of these:

three respondents had no objections to the proposals but suggested that ministerial involvement in all parole and lifer cases should cease.

one respondent favoured further delegation to the Parole Board but suggested a cut-off point of 10 years rather than 15 years.

one respondent suggested that the number of previous parole reviews should determine which cases should be decided by the Parole Board.

In the light of the positive responses to the paper, I have today laid before Parliament a draft Order giving effect to the proposals.

Medway Secure Training Centre

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of young offenders who have served a sentence at the Medway Secure Training Centre subsequently obtained a school place in each of the last five years. [59405]

Mr. Boateng: Since Medway Secure Training Centre opened on 17 April 1998, a total of 29 trainees have been released to serve the second half of the Secure Training Order sentence under supervision in the community. At the time of release, arrangements were in place for eight to go straightaway into full time education, with 16 receiving part time tuition for several hours per week. The remaining five had no firm arrangements for education at the point of release, but provision has since been made for four of them to receive education, including two who have been placed in full time education.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement; [60060]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [60062]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government Departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. Departments' plans have been published in the Library. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library and on the internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60061]

Mr. Straw: Four millennium compliance problems have occurred in my Department, affecting management information, statistical and payroll data. Three of these were solved before December 1997. In the fourth case, the few statistical records affected are being dealt with manually while the software is corrected. This correction is due to be completed by the end of December 1998. The agencies and public bodies for which my Department is responsible have not reported any compliance problems.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60063]

Mr. Straw: Contingency planning is a major element of the response of my Department and its agencies to the millennium date change problem. In line with recent Cabinet Office recommendations, the target is to have initial contingency plans in place by the end of January 1999.

Chief executives of national departmental public bodies and similar bodies sponsored by my Department provided quarterly progress reports against their Year 2000 plans, for publication on the Internet. These refer specifically to contingency planning.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers ordinarily resident in a non-EU European country sought entry to the UK, by country of residence, in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what were *(a)* the numbers of Roma people and *(b)* the citizenship of the applicants, within each of the individual country totals. [59906]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information regarding persons applying for asylum in the United Kingdom gives a breakdown only by nationality. I regret, therefore, that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been provided with accommodation by local authorities in seaside towns since 1996. [60351]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This information is not held by my Department.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on securing accommodation *(a)* directly and *(b)* by contracting with local agencies in seaside towns for asylum seekers under the proposed new national support scheme. [60350]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The project team is currently considering the issue of the provision of accommodation, but it is too soon to indicate precisely how accommodation will be supplied. The issue is appropriate accommodation availability, not proximity to the sea.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions he or his Department have had with local authorities and other interested parties in seaside towns regarding the availability of accommodation for asylum seekers under the proposed new national support scheme; [60348]

(2) what assessment he has made of the availability of accommodation in seaside towns for asylum seekers under the proposed new national support scheme. [60347]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There has been no such assessment on discussions directed at seaside towns.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for consultation on the operation of the proposed new national support scheme for asylum seekers with *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations, *(c)* voluntary bodies and *(d)* the private sector. [60352]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have set up a stakeholder group, consisting of representatives of Government, local authorities, housing associations and voluntary bodies. That group will meet with the project team at key stages of the project. In addition, the project team will be consulting widely, including with representatives of the private sector, about the plans for the support system.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on directing local authorities and housing associations to provide surplus accommodation for asylum seekers under the proposed new support arrangements. [60349]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There will be a general duty on local authorities to assist the Secretary of State in discharging his functions to provide accommodation. That duty is to extend to registered social landlords, but only so far as is compatible with their memoranda and articles of association. A local authority is also to be under a duty to supply such information about its housing stock in such manner as the Secretary of State may reasonably direct. There will also be a power for the Secretary of State to direct local authorities to provide accommodation if he concludes that a particular local authority is unreasonably refusing to do so.

Integrated Emergency Management

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place between the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on national standards of integrated emergency management. [59590]

Mr. George Howarth: Officials at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) are aware that National Standards for civil protection in England and Wales are being developed. No formal discussions have taken place between the Home Office and DETR to date.

Dr. Robert Gross

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Minister in his Department is responsible for the handling of the request from the United States of America for the extradition of Dr. Robert Gross; what discretion is available to him in extradition cases; and what are the factors which will influence the exercise of that discretion. [59525]

Kate Hoey: A request by the United States for the extradition of Dr. Gross is currently before the courts awaiting the hearing of a habeas corpus application. It will be my responsibility, if he is not discharged by the courts, to decide in due course whether his surrender should be ordered.

At that stage, Dr. Gross would have an opportunity to make representations against surrender. In reaching a final decision under the Extradition Act 1989, I would have

regard to all of the circumstances in the case, including any grounds for concluding that it would be wrong, unjust or oppressive to order surrender.

Offenders (Service Provision)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the provision of services for offenders diagnosed as having both mental health and substance misuse problems. [59699]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service is committed to improving services for prisoners with mental health problems who do not meet the criteria for transfer to hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983. A joint Prison Service/National Health Service Executive working group has considered ways of increasing the NHS input to services for prisoners with mental health problems. The Government will consider the working group's report and recommendations very carefully.

Prison Medical Officers are encouraged to establish links with their catchment area psychiatric units to enable the assessment of mentally disordered prisoners and, if appropriate, their transfer to psychiatric hospital. The number of prisoners transferred under the 1983 Act has risen from 325 in 1990 to 745 in 1997.

The Prison Service is to be allocated an extra £76 million over the next three financial years to help implement its drugs strategy. This will allow a major expansion of drug treatment services. It will also deliver the Government's manifesto commitment on voluntary testing and improve throughcare arrangements for drug misusers.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders were introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The aim of the orders is to provide effective treatment in the community, with rigorous testing to evaluate an offender's progress. Pilots have started in three probation service areas and funding of £1.75m has been provided for these pilots, which will run until March 2000. In addition, probation services are being encouraged to contribute from existing resources to partnership work with other agencies to address the problems of other drug misusing offenders under their supervision.

Probation Service (Paedophiles)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide additional funding for probation services which have significantly greater than average workloads as a result of the supervision of paedophiles. [59702]

Mr. George Howarth: Over the next three financial years, we are providing an additional £127 million in probation grant, which takes account of the work which area services have to undertake in supervising sexual offenders; but we have no present plans to adjust the formula used to allocate grant to probation areas to reflect the number or proportion of paedophile offenders under supervision in each area.

Firearms Compensation

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average time currently taken to process claims under categories A and B of the Firearms Compensation Scheme; [59853]

(2) how many people under categories A, B and C of the Firearms Compensation Scheme have received full compensation for their claims; [59854]

(3) what is the current delay in processing applications for compensation under Category C of the Firearms Compensation Scheme; and what was the delay *(a)* one month ago and *(b)* two months ago. [59852]

Mr. Boateng: Payments under Options A and B of the compensation scheme for large calibre handguns and the ex gratia scheme for small calibre pistols were completed at the end of May, apart from a small number of cases still under inquiry, in an average processing time of 19 weeks. Processing of the Option A and B claims under the statutory compensation scheme for small calibre pistols surrendered during February 1998 began in August, and around three quarters of these claims have now been paid in an average processing time of 30 weeks.

The average processing time for claims processed so far under Option C of the compensation scheme for large calibre handguns and small calibre pistols is 53 weeks. In the great majority of these cases, payments have already been made under Options A and B. I regret that information is not available on the comparable processing times for earlier periods.

Around 42,000 claimants under the large calibre and ex gratia schemes and around 7,000 claimants under the statutory small calibre scheme have received payment under Options A and B. Around 6,500 claimants under the large calibre and ex gratia schemes have received payment under Option C. Option C payments under the statutory small calibre scheme will begin when the overall work position permits.

I outlined the measures we are taking to speed the processing of the compensation claims in my reply to a written question from the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *179–80.*

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Junior Football Clubs (Injury Insurance)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will make it a requirement for junior football clubs that they provide adequate insurance against injury for their members; [59710]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the adequacy of insurance against injury for the members of junior football clubs; [59709]

(3) what requirements there are for junior football clubs to provide adequate insurance against injury for their members. [59708]

Mr. Banks: I have received no representations to date concerning the adequacy of insurance against injury for the members of junior football clubs. Responsibility for personal injury insurance for junior football club members rests with the clubs themselves. I understand that although there is no requirement for junior football clubs to take out personal injury insurance policies the Football Association is encouraging its County Associations to stress the importance of best practice in

this area to their affiliated clubs. A number of County FAs are working closely with insurance companies to develop personal injury insurance schemes on a corporate basis for all their affiliated clubs. These pilot schemes are an encouraging development.

Coalfield Communities

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of lottery funds excluding Millennium Landmark projects has been received by coalfield communities in *(a)* South Yorkshire and *(b)* nationally. [59820]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* In the coalfield communities of South Yorkshire, which comprise the local authorities of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, there have been 608 non-Landmark awards worth £112,812,862. This represents 2.78 per cent. of the National total of over £4.25 billion awarded to 31,788 non-landmark awards.

Information on lottery awards is available on the Department's website www.lottery.culture.gov.uk.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the *(a)* average value and *(b)* number of lottery grants of less than £1 million received by coalfield communities (i) in South Yorkshire and (ii) nationally. [59822]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* To date the National Lottery distributors have awarded over £5.07 billion to 31,788 awards. In the coalfield communities of South Yorkshire there have been 609 awards worth £162,812,862.

The average value and number of grants in South Yorkshire coalfield communities and nationally are set out in the following table:

	Average value of all awards (£)	*Total number of awards under £1 million*
Coalfield communities in South Yorkshire	267,344	577
Nationally	159,684	31,111

Information on lottery awards is available on the Department's website www.lottery.culture.gov.uk.

Sport (Injury Insurance)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what statistics are collected by, or reported to, his Department relating to minors sustaining personal injury while taking part in the activities of junior sports clubs. [59707]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The Department does not collect information on injuries from sporting activities at junior clubs. Although the hospital episode statistics data system has information on injuries and accidents, these relate only to events which require medical treatment at a hospital. These do not specify the location of the accident. The Department of Trade and Industry's Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System records treatment for injuries from sporting activities from a sample of accident and emergency departments in the United Kingdom. Under this system an estimated 215,000 children under 15 had sports injuries in 1996 in the UK. Although the database cannot identify whether they occurred in junior sports clubs, it can differentiate between organised and non-organised games.

CABINET OFFICE

Sickness Absence

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what are the figures for *(a)* the public sector, including local authorities, grant-maintained schools and NHS trusts and *(b)* the private sector for days lost due to absence from work through sickness, expressed as a number of days per employee in each sector in the most recent available year. [59584]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Information about the average number of days lost per employee due to absence through sickness in the public and private sectors is not collected centrally. However, the Office for National Statistics estimate from the Labour Force Survey that in the United Kingdom 5.5 per cent. of public sector employees and 4.4 per cent. of private sector employees were absent from work due to sickness or injury for at least one day in an average week between autumn 1997 and summer 1998.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to his oral statement of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 168, what the remit will be of the better regulation task force's assessment of SMEs; and when he expects them to report. [60150]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to which the question refers was a reference to a review of the role of regulation in relation to productivity which will be undertaken by the Better Regulation Task Force, for which this Department has responsibility. The review was first announced in the pre-Budget Statement on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 681–702.

I can confirm that the Task Force has established a sub-group to take this work forward. They are currently agreeing the details of their terms of reference, including the timetable for this work. The review will examine the degree to which regulation acts as a barrier to business start-up, survival and growth. The Task Force will consider existing material and seek further evidence from a wide range of interested parties.

I hope that the Task Force will present their first findings next Spring, and a final report as soon as practicable thereafter.

Relocation

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the decision was taken to relocate parts of the Cabinet Office to Admiralty Arch, Ripley Block and Kirkland House; and if he will make a statement. [60470]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The relocation was announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *132–33*, in connection

with the review of the Cabinet Office by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson. The funding for the project was agreed as part of this Department's Comprehensive Spending Review, in collaboration with HM Treasury. The buildings will be occupied by civil servants. Although these decisions were taken before my appointment to the Cabinet Office, I fully support this initiative to create a focus for the drive to modernise Government and to tackle the new challenges it faces. Ministerial accommodation will remain at 70 Whitehall.

DEFENCE

Gulf War

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if British tanks fired depleted uranium shells during the Gulf War; and if he will make a statement. [59333]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Main Battle Tank used by UK forces during the Gulf conflict in 1990–91 was the Challenger 1, armed with the 120mm rifled-barrel L11 gun. However, when planning Operation GRANBY, it was assessed that the existing tungsten-based armour-piercing rounds in use with Challenger 1 might not be sufficiently powerful to defeat the most modern Iraqi tanks—Soviet designed T72s. It was therefore decided that MOD should undertake the emergency development and deployment of a new armour-piercing round for Challenger 1.

This new round was based on a 120mm armour-piercing round, containing a solid depleted uranium (DU) penetrator core with a protective (non-DU) coating and known as CHARM 1, which was already being developed for use by the more powerful gun on the new Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank, also then under development. In fact, the CHARM 1 round needed only minor modifications in order to fit the existing gun on Challenger 1, but a totally new charge needed to be developed. The new charge and slightly modified round, known as Jericho I and Jericho II respectively, were deployed to the Gulf and issued to UK armoured formations just before the start of Coalition operations against Iraq.

The MOD's current assessment is that UK forces fired fewer than 100 Jericho II rounds against Iraqi military forces during hostilities, which equates to less than 1 metric tonne of DU overall, although additional rounds were fired during earlier work-up training to establish the round's Mean Point of Impact (MPI).

Territorial Army

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors were taken into account in deciding to reduce the size of the TA force; and if he will make a statement. [59695]

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce his conclusions on the future of the Territorial Army. [60246]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the statement I made earlier today, *Official Report*, columns 749–70.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Territorial Army building, Surbiton Road, Kingston-Upon-Thames. [59865]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the document concerning the future of the Territorial Army, placed in the Library of the House today.

Training Review

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects his Department to complete its review of its training methods. [56348]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have completed our initial review of my Department's training methods and now plan a further study involving representatives of the Royal College of Surgeons and other bodies to determine appropriate means of providing necessary training in surgical trauma skills. We intend that the study should be led by an independent figure and should be completed in the first part of next year. Meanwhile, UK military participation in the Danish Armed Forces medical exercises involving the use of pigs remains suspended.

Gulf War Illness

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those hon. Members who have made representations to him on behalf of constituents concerning Gulf War illness. [58808]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My Department's record show that, since 1 May 1997, the following hon. Members have made representations to Ministry of Defence Ministers on behalf of one or more constituents concerning Gulf veterans' illnesses:

Adams, Mrs. Irene (Paisley, North)
Anderson, Donald (Swansea, East)
Ashdown, Rt. Hon. Jeremy John Durham (Yeovil)
Ashton, Joseph William (Bassetlaw)
Atherton, Candy (Falmouth and Camborne)
Ballard, Jacqueline Margaret (Taunton)
Barnes, Harry (North-East Derbyshire)
Benn, Rt. Hon. Anthony Neil Wedgwood (Chesterfield)
Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy, TD (Canterbury)
Breed, Colin Edward (South-East Cornwall)
Bruce, Ian (South Dorset)
Byers, Stephen John (Tyneside, North)
Cann, Jamie (Ipswich)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh, North and Leith)
Clark, Rt. Hon. Dr. David George (South Shields)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey, ARICS (Cotswold)
Cooper, Yvette (Pontefract and Castleford)
Curry, Rt. Hon. David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)
Dalyell, Tam (Linlithgow)
Darling, Rt. Hon. Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davies, Rt. Hon. Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davey, Mrs. Valerie (Bristol, West)
Evans, Nigel (Ribble Valley)
Ewing, Margaret Anne (Moray)
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Fitzsimons, Lorna (Rochdale)
Foster, Michael John (Worcester)

Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Gapes, Michael John (Ilford, South)
Gilroy, Linda (Plymouth, Sutton)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grocott, Bruce (Telford)
Hancock, Michael Thomas, CBE (Portsmouth, South)
Harman, Rt. Hon. Harriet (Camberwell and Peckham)
Harvey, Nicholas (North Devon)
Haselhurst, Sir Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Heath, David Williams St. John, CBE (Somerton and Frome)
Heppell, John (Nottingham, East)
Home-Robertson, John (East Lothian)
Hoyle, Hon. Lindsay Harvey (Chorley)
Humble, Mrs. Jovanka (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hutton, John (Barrow and Furness)
Johnson, Alan Arthur (Hull, West and Hessle)
Johnson, Melanie Jane (Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
King, Rt. Hon. Tom, CH (Bridgwater)
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen John (South Thanet)
Lawrence, Jackie (Preseli Pembrokeshire)
Lewis, Terry (Worsley)
Liddell, Mrs. Helen Lawrie (Airdrie and Shotts)
Lilley, Rt. Hon. Peter Bruce (Hitchin and Harpenden)
Linton, Martin (Battersea)
Malins, Humfrey Jonathan (Woking)
Mawhinney, Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Stanley (North-West Cambridgeshire)
McCafferty, Christine (Calder Valley)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
McIsaac, Shona (Cleethorpes)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Hull, North)
Moore, Michael Kevin (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
O'Neill, Martin John (Ochil)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (South-East Cambridgeshire)
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Pickthall, Colin (West Lancashire)
Plaskitt, James Andrew (Warwick and Leamington)
Pope, Gregory (Hyndburn)
Prescott, Rt. Hon. John Leslie (Hull, East)
Quinn, Lawrie (Scarborough and Whitby)
Randall, John (Uxbridge)
Rendel, David Digby (Newbury)
Ruane, Christopher (Vale of Clwyd)
Russell, Christine Margaret (City of Chester)
Shaw, Jonathan Rowlan (Chatham and Aylesford)
Sheldon, Rt. Hon. Robert Edward (Ashton-under-Lyne)
Smith, Rt. Hon. Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Geraldine (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Smith, John William Patrick (Vale of Glamorgan)
Smith, Llewellyn Thomas (Blaenau Gwent)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush)
Spring, Richard (West Suffolk)
Squire, Rachel (Dumfermline, West)
Stinchcombe, Paul (Wellingborough)
Strang, Rt. Hon. Dr. Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh)
Swinney, John Ramsay (North Tayside)
Todd, Mark Wainwright (South Derbyshire)
Yeo, Timothy Stephen Kenneth (South Suffolk).

Service Children's Education

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to set targets for pupils in schools operated by the Service Children's Education Authority; and if the Service Children's Education Authority is to be included within the inspection regime currently in operation for local education authorities. [59190]

Mr. Spellar: Service Children's Education is an Agency of the Ministry of Defence charged with the provision of education services to MOD personnel serving overseas and with the provision of advice to service personnel in UK on educational matters. Key Targets for the Agency are approved annually by Ministers and those for 1998 were announced in the House on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *565–66*. In addition, the current Key Targets are set out in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts which were laid before Parliament on 30 July 1998.

Whilst SCE schools are subject to inspection by Ofsted, the Agency falls outside Ofsted's remit to monitor Local Education Authorities. However, the Chief Executive reports on a termly basis to an Owner's Board whose membership includes representatives of the DfEE, Ofsted and an LEA. SCE is also subject to MOD's own internal management inspection and audit as well as being audited annually by the National Audit Office for the production of the Agency's Accounts.

Officer Training Corps (Queen's University)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Officer Training Corps at Queen's University, Belfast. [57588]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Department has no plans to make changes to the University Officer Training Corps. Queen's University Officer Training Corps will continue to provide an opportunity for students to undertake a wide variety of military training, which will enable them to develop their self-confidence and initiative and to gain useful skills for any future profession.

Major Eric Joyce

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take following the recent appearance on television of Major Eric Joyce speaking on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party; and if this contravened Queen's Regulations. [58791]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Serving members of the Armed Forces are not permitted under Queen's Regulations for the Army to take an active part in the affairs of any political organisation. Major Joyce's future in the Army is currently under consideration by the Army Board.

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will undertake a study of the potential environmental effects of cruise missiles landing on *(a)* oil wells and *(b)* petroleum-refining complexes. [59547]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* We have no current plans to undertake such a study.

Field Park Squadron

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what receipts were generated for the Defence Budget by 198 Field Park Squadron in financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [59467]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There have been no significant receipts generated to the Defence Budget by 198 Field Park Squadron in the last three financial years.

Hurricane Mitch

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the marginal costs that will be incurred by the Ministry of Defence in assisting the provision of aid and relief to Central America following Hurricane Mitch. [59466]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Full details of the marginal costs to the Ministry of Defence of providing this humanitarian assistance are not yet available. We estimate, however, that the figure should be below £100,000, as help has been provided by forces which would otherwise have been engaged in operations or training in the Caribbean area.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Council (1) what is her latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in her Department, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if she will make a statement; [60052]

(2) if she will list the problems which have arisen in her Department from millennium compliance; if she will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work; [60053]

(3) what assessment she has made of the extent to which the computer systems in her Department will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if she will make a statement; [60054]

(4) if she will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by her Department in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60055]

Mrs. Beckett: Work on ensuring the Millennium compliance of the Privy Council Office's systems is being taken forward as part of the Cabinet Office's Year 2000 Programme. No insurmountable problems are expected for the Cabinet Office and its agencies arising from millennium compliance. Plans are well advanced to replace non-compliant systems as part of an ongoing programme of work. Business continuity is not believed to be at risk, but the Cabinet Office and its agencies nevertheless have continuity plans that cater for possible disruption. Details of the Cabinet Office's programme, together with costs, were published following my last quarterly statement to the House on 9 September and are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Council what estimate she has made of the cost to the UK public sector of tackling the millennium computer problem and the embedded chip problem; and if she will make a statement. [59945]

Mrs. Beckett: The latest estimate of the cost of tackling the Millennium bug across central government departments and agencies is £400 million. This figure is based on departmental returns to the September quarterly review.

Forecasts which have been made by independent experts and companies with experience of the costs of tackling the problem have put the total cost of tackling the Millennium bug across the whole of the UK public sector in the range of £1 billion-£3 billion. These figures appear to be reasonable. For example, the NHS Executive has estimated the cost across the NHS in England at around £310 million, while the Local Government Association has put the cost to local authorities at £500 million.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Council what action she is taking to increase the preparedness of *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the Police, *(c)* defence forces and *(d)* the NHS in relation to the millennium computer problem; and if she will make a statement. [59946]

Mrs. Beckett: As the Cabinet Minister responsible for the co-ordination of Government policy in response to the Millennium Bug, I have been working with colleagues to drive forward action in both the public and private sector. As a key part of this work, I am responsible for monitoring and reporting on the progress across all central government departments and agencies and key parts of the wider public sector, including local authorities, the Police, the Ministry of Defence and the NHS. Details of the progress in each of these four sectors were included in the last quarterly statement which I issued on 9 September. I will be making my next quarterly statement on progress in tackling the Millennium Bug to the House shortly. Specific questions about progress in these four sectors are the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Home Affairs, Defence, and Health respectively.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Passes

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if she will publish the total number of House of Commons passes issued for persons

classified as assistants/research assistants to hon. Members, and the known number who work full or part-time in the above positions. [59944]

Mrs. Roe *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* 448 photo-identity passes have been issued for hon. Members' research assistants. The numbers who work full or part-time are not known, as an hon. Member is not required to give this information.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorist Offences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been *(a)* killed by explosions caused by terrorists and *(b)* killed by bombs which they were constructing, transporting or placing in position, in each of the last 10 years and the current year. [59030]

Mr. Ingram: The following table illustrates the number of persons killed by explosions caused by terrorists and by their own bombs over the period in question:

Year	*Number of deaths caused by explosions*	*Killed by own bomb*	*Total*
1988	39	3	42
1989	16	1	17
1990	22	0	22
1991	18	0	18
1992	11	0	11
1993	17	2	19
1994	5	0	5
1995	0	0	0
1996	1	0	1
1997	2	1	3
1998[1]	30	0	30

[1] To 8 November

Omagh Bombing

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the injuries suffered by the surviving victims of the Omagh bomb. [55477]

Mr. Ingram: *(a)* The following is a list of the injuries suffered by the surviving victims, admitted to hospital, in the immediate aftermath of the Omagh bomb:

Abdominal Organ Injuries: 4

Amputees: 5

Blast Lung: 1

Burns: 8

Eye Injuries: 2

Fractures: 24

Fracture and Eye Injury: 3

Head Injury: 1

Soft Tissue Injury: 10

Wounds/Shrapnel: 77.

Many of the victims had multiple injuries. Injuries treated for those victims who were not admitted to hospital included wounds, shrapnel injuries, soft tissue injuries and ear injuries.

(b) Three of the surviving victims remain in hospital at the present time. Injuries suffered by the three patients are as follows:

Burns [over 60% of body] and multiple injuries

Amputation of lower leg and severe burns

Amputation of lower leg and multiple shrapnel injuries.

Regional and Minority Languages

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list *(a)* Ulster Scots and *(b)* Irish as two minority languages to benefit from the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; and if she will make a statement. [59289]

Mr. McFall: The Government intend that the Charter will apply to the Irish language in Northern Ireland from the coming into operation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In regard to Ulster-Scots, arrangements are in hand to commission independent academic research which will help to determine whether Ulster-Scots should be treated as a language for purposes of the Charter. The Charter does not distinguish between regional languages and minority languages.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what child care provision is made available by her Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this child care; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59730]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* In Northern Ireland, current policy is that Departments can contribute to staff child care costs where this is justified on value for money grounds.

The Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments do not provide child care facilities. However, child care provision in the form of subsidy based schemes is only one of a range of family friendly measures that are available to staff. Others include flexible working hours, part-time and job sharing arrangements, paid and unpaid special leave and career breaks and reimbursement of expenses when the normal working routine is broken by the job demands. Information packs from the Northern Ireland Childminding Association are also given to staff applying for maternity or paternity leave.

In addition, some Departments provide a range of assistance schemes as follows.

In April 1998, NIO (Belfast) introduced a child care voucher scheme for staff which provided a contribution of £60 per month towards pre-school child care costs. Initially places on the scheme have been limited to 23 (2.8 per cent. of total staff) but it is planned to extend it to all staff with pre-school children within the next four years. NIO (London) introduced a similar scheme in July 1997 at the rate of £100 per month per child under the age of 5. Prior to July 1997, the NIO (London) subsidised 5 places in a nursery close to the office. The total proportion of staff that used these facilities in 1996–97 was 3 (2.9 per cent.) and in 1997–98 was 5 (4.4 per cent.).

In the Department of Health and Social Services, the Child Support Agency provides financial assistance to staff in the form of a subsidy towards the cost of placing a child in a registered nursery of the parents choice. The parents pay the first £30 of the cost, the Agency pays up to the next £30 (grossed up by 45.7 per cent. to cover Tax and NI Contributions) and the parent pays the balance. There are 40 subsidies available. In 1996–97, 30 (2 per cent. of staff) were taken up and 40 (3 per cent.) in 1997–98.

The Department of the Environment provides a pre-school nursery subsidy scheme for up to 44 staff at any one time selected by a random draw. A reserve list is held to fill drop-outs from the 44. The subsidy is 35 per cent. of the weekly nursery fees up to a maximum of £30 gross per week. Forty-eight staff (0.6 per cent.) received subsidies in 1996–97 and 54 (0.7 per cent.) in 1997–98.

The Department of Education, in May 1997, introduced an emergency child care subsidy scheme to provide the actual cost of emergency child care for a maximum of 2 days on any one occasion (limited to 4 occasions in a year) with the care provider being a registered childminder, playgroup or nursery. There has been no uptake of the subsidy. The scheme was introduced on a trial basis and the Department is presently reviewing the aspect of sufficient time off for staff to make alternative arrangements which has been identified as the main difficulty with the scheme.

The Department of Finance and Personnel, through the Equal Opportunities Unit, financially assists 8 holiday playschemes. Subsidies of 50 per cent. accommodation costs and 40 per cent. staff costs are provided to each playscheme. Total financial assistance in 1997 was £20,250.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60145]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Following recommendations made by the PAC, the President of the Council wrote to Cabinet colleagues and Ministers in October asking all Departments to complete risk assessments and have initial year 2000 business continuity plans in place by the end of January 1999. This has been conveyed to all Northern Ireland Departments and they have been informed that future quarterly surveys by the Cabinet Office will require reports on progress against targets in this area. Millennium contingency planning has to cover the eventuality of system failures due to embedded chip malfunction.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is her latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which her Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if she will make a statement; [60142]

(2) what assessment she has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which her Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if she will make a statement. [60144]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. In Northern Ireland, the Departments and their agencies are directly responsible for much of the services provided by local government and the privatised utilities in Great Britain—e.g., Health and Personal Social Service, Housing Benefits, Water and Sewage. Electricity is the only privatised service in Northern Ireland.

The information that the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of departments' plans which have been published in the Libraries of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Libraries of the House and on the Internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which her Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if she will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60143]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The problems are the same for all organisations striving for millennium compliance and the Northern Ireland departments are working closely with their Great Britain counterparts, sharing information and advice, to address these. Specifically, some departments in Northern Ireland have lost skilled computer staff to the private sector and this has impacted on some compliance programmes. However, steps are being taken by the individual departments and centrally by the Northern Ireland public service to address the situation.

Northern Ireland Bill

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *34*, concerning the human rights and equality provisions of the Northern Ireland Bill, if she will place in the Library copies of her correspondence with the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe. [60270]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Copies of correspondence between myself and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe have been placed in the Library.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Montserrat

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the final version of the Sustainable Development Plan for Montserrat will be published. [60359]

Mr. Foulkes: Agreement has been reached between the Government of Montserrat and Her Majesty's Government on the final text of the Sustainable Development Plan. This followed a wide-ranging consultation exercise involving Montserratians on island, elsewhere in the Caribbean and in the UK, and regional and international aid agencies. The plan reflects the shared priorities of our two Governments for the social and economic recovery of the island and sets out a plan for the future of the island and the strategies needed to achieve its goals and objectives.

Copies of the final text will be placed in the Libraries of the House today. The formal published version will be made available in early December.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what is her latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which her Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if she will make a statement; [60056]

(2) what assessment she has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which her Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if she will make a statement. [60058]

Mr. Foulkes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right. hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of departments' plans which have been published in the Library of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Libraries of the House and on the internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which her Department is responsible for millennium compliance; if she will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work; [60057]

(2) if she will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60059]

Mr. Foulkes: We have recently reviewed the Year 2000 compliance programme. Work is well advanced on mission-critical systems and we have systems in place for testing at various milestone dates. Our key systems will be fully tested and independently audited before the Year 2000.

Our current switchboard is not compliant, but will become so with the next installation of software which will be in place before the end of 1998. Our equipment to send telexes is not compliant, but is in any case to be discarded for more modern forms of communications. We shall provide fuller details in our next quarterly return.

We have obtained assurances from our prime hardware and software suppliers. In several cases we are required to upgrade software to more modern versions. We have developed a programme of work to take this forward. Progress is reported in our quarterly return.

Work will start in early December to develop a separate series of business continuity plans, which will complement the work already done on business critical systems. Progress will be reported in the appropriate quarterly return.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which forum the Government will propose as appropriate for future negotiations on a multilateral agreement on investment, in order to ensure *(a)* that the interests of developing countries are represented and *(b)* that developing countries are equal participants in the negotiations. [59183]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government, and the EU as a whole, have a long-standing objective of pursuing investment negotiations in the WTO, and have called for investment to be on the agenda of any future multilateral Round of negotiations. This objective was reflected in the White Paper on International Development in November 1997, underlining the developmental value of a stable and transparent framework for international investment.

Any decision to begin negotiations on multilateral investment disciplines in the WTO will require consensus among WTO members. Over three quarters of WTO members are developing countries. We are committed to helping strengthen the capacity of developing countries—many of which have limited resources—to participate effectively in the WTO. Specifically on investment, we have already agreed a contribution of over £0.5 million for a programme run by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to provide advice and training to developing countries on the issues posed by a possible multilateral framework for investment.

SCOTLAND

Local Government

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's current estimate of the cost to be borne by Scottish local authorities arising from new central Government initiatives in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and

(c) the following three years, by initiative, indicating the contribution to be made towards such costs from central Government. [56952]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* In 1998–99 the following amounts were added to the local government finance spending plans inherited from the previous Administration:

Additional resources for schools: £89 million (announced in the July 1997 Budget) plus £19 million (announced in March 1998 Budget).

Recommendations resulting from the Pennington Report: £2.6 million.

The cost of new central Government initiatives over the next three years was considered in the course of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. In total, following the review the following additional resources (each representing increases compared with 1998–99) have been provided over the next three years:

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Education	154	266	373
Social Work	51	94	130
Police	23.7	50.9	71.8
Fire	8.5	16.9	24.3
Other Services including Loans Charges	58.8	163.5	319.2

Decisions for subsequent years have not yet been made.

Youth Clubs

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make more money available to youth clubs in areas with high levels of juvenile crime. [57609]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The Scottish Office does not provide funding for youth clubs. In the main youth clubs are run by local authorities or voluntary groups which have access to local facilities. The Scottish Office provides a grant to Youth Clubs Scotland, a national voluntary organisation which is involved with the informal education of young people. The grant towards headquarters expenditure is awarded under the Scottish Office community education recurrent grant scheme for voluntary organisations. Youth Clubs Scotland has been awarded a grant of £75,000 in 1998–99, an increase of 7 per cent..

Youth Employment

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of young people who took up the employment option under the New Deal have secured full-time employment at the end of their placement *(a)* in total and *(b)* by local authority area. [58980]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* The latest New Deal figures published by the Government Statistical Service relate to August, and information on those completing their placement is not yet available. We plan in future to publish figures by units of delivery which in Scotland are based on local enterprise company areas.

Intellectual Property

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the purpose and scope of the reservation of intellectual property in the Scotland Bill. [60441]

Mr. McLeish: The purpose of the reservation is to ensure the continuation of uniform intellectual property laws across the UK. This will avoid difficulties for owners of intellectual property rights arising from, for example, difference in what can be protected, the extent of the protection and remedies for breach of rights. Indeed, the benefits of harmonisation in this area are becoming increasingly recognised with the ever wider harmonisation of intellectual property rights and related matters across Europe and the rest of the world.

Patents, designs, registered trade marks and copyright are well known examples of intellectual property rights and are reserved. The reservation also embraces all other existing and future analogous rights and matters, such as rights in performances and semi-conductor topographies, moral rights, the law of passing off and trade secrets, and the new database right. Moreover, rights such as those in utility models and matters such as technical measures for the protection of copyright works and information relating to the management of rights, all of which are included in recent draft EC Directives on intellectual property, fall within the scope of the reservation. Furthermore, all matters relating to the Patent Office are reserved, as are current and future ancillary matters.

The existing major legislation on intellectual property, namely the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, the Patents Act 1977, the Trade Marks Act 1994 and the Registered Designs Act 1949, exemplifies but does not limit the range of provisions relating to 'intellectual property' which falls or may in the future fall within the reservation.

There is just one exception from the reservation, that is UK plant breeders' rights within the meaning of the Plant Varieties Act 1997. Agricultural Ministers, that is the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, are jointly responsible for UK plant breeders' rights. Devolution in this one area of intellectual property is therefore consistent with the joint responsibility which already exists for plant breeders' rights.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement; [60136]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [60134]

Mr. Dewar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, announcing the results of the most recent quarterly review of Government Departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the Year 2000 date change issue and providing information on progress and costs. Information on progress in the wider public sector in Scotland, including the National Health Service, water authorities, nationalised industries and some non-departmental public bodies, is available on The Scottish Office's Web site. The results of the next quarterly review of progress will be announced shortly to the House and updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library of the House and on the Web.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60137]

Mr. Dewar: My Department and Agencies recognise the need to review and keep up to date their plans to deal with threats to business community, including the millennium date change. I expect them to have completed a review of key aspects of their operations, and to ensure that appropriate plans are in place, by the end of January 1999.

Planning to ensure the continued delivery of key public services is primarily the responsibility of those who manage these services. The Scottish Office will continue to encourage organisations in the wider public sector in Scotland to ensure that their contingency plans are adequate in the light of the millennium date change issue.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60135]

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Office has been working since 1996 to ensure that the service it provides to the public will not be materially affected by the Year 2000 computer problem. The Department expects that all of its important systems will be tested and proved to be Year 2000 compliant by March 1999. Agencies and other public sector bodies in Scotland including the water authorities, the NHS in Scotland, local authorities, the nationalised industries and certain non-departmental public bodies are responsible for ensuring that their services will not be materially affected by the problem. Their progress is monitored by The Scottish Office. A range of progress reports is published on the Web, including the Web sites maintained by The Scottish Office, the NHS in Scotland and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency.

Financial Management

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to ensure adequate training in financial management of those in charge of the financial management of projects receiving Government funding as a condition of grant; [59630]

(2) what plans he has to insist on adequate external auditing and monitoring of projects receiving Government funding as a condition of grant. [59631]

Mr. McLeish: Grant conditions, and monitoring arrangements for different grant schemes operated by The Scottish Office are set taking into account all the circumstances surrounding the individual scheme. The conditions and monitoring arrangements are kept under review.

Where the grant is towards a particular project the conditions normally include a requirement for external validation that the grant has been used for the purpose for which it was provided. Alternatively, in the case of grants to local authorities, the Scottish Office may make arrangements directly with the Accounts Commission for Scotland for the external auditing of councils' grant claims.

In the particular case of grants under the Urban Programme to local authorities, the standard terms and conditions require local authorities to establish effective appraisal, monitoring and financial systems.

These conditions also require the local authority to ensure that the expenditure by third parties receiving funding from the Council is accounted for properly; and that the accounts of third parties are either audited statutorily, or in the case of unincorporated bodies, reported on by a qualified accountant.

The reporting accountants have to report if they are not satisfied: that proper records have been kept; that the accounts are consistent with the records; that they have received all necessary information; and that other information in the annual report is consistent with the financial statements.

Training in financial management is a matter for the bodies concerned.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that councils arrange for adequate auditing arrangements and training in financial management when giving grants to projects receiving public funds. [59629]

Mr. McLeish: Local authorities are fully responsible for ensuring that there is clear public accountability where they provide public funds to external bodies. I expect councils to follow the guidance laid out by the Accounts Commission and COSLA in the Code of Guidance on Funding External Bodies and Following the Public Pound. This sets out the procedures for specifying minimum standards of accountancy and audit arrangements in appropriate cases. Where these are found wanting in individual cases, I would expect councils to take firm corrective action.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the recent report by Edinburgh City Council into the financial management of publicly funded projects in the city. [59632]

Mr. McLeish: The City of Edinburgh Council has identified weaknesses in the management of some projects. This is primarily a matter for the Council but the Government place the highest importance on the proper conduct and management of projects and organisations which are publicly funded and discussions are taking place with the Council on the issues raised in its report and the action it should take.

Aspirin Poisoning

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in how many cases in Scotland in each of the past five years individuals have had to spend more than one night in hospital because of aspirin poisoning. [59638]

Mr. Galbraith: Information on the number of emergency admissions staying more than one night in hospital with a reported diagnosis of aspirin poisoning is shown in the table. The table refers to the number of emergency admissions during the specified year. It is possible that an individual patient may have had more than one admission in any year.

The data exclude poisoning by compounds of aspirin with phenacetin-codeine which cannot be separately identified under the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases 9th Revision.

Year	*Number*[1]
1992	151
1993	179
1994	146
1995	160
1996	156

[1] Diagnoses are coded to the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases 9th Revision (1980–March 1996) code 965.1 and the International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision (April 1996-) code T30.9

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths have been recorded in Scotland from aspirin poisoning in each of the past five years, and in how many of these cases aspirin had been taken *(a)* in soluble form and *(b)* in dispensable form. [59633]

Mr. Galbraith: The information available is given in the list. It is not possible to distinguish the form in which the aspirin had been taken.

Deaths from poisoning involving aspirin[1], Scotland

1993: 6

1994: 9

1995: 2

1996: 2

1997: 6.

[1] Includes cases where aspirin was taken together with other drugs.

Paracetamol Poisoning

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths have been recorded in Scotland from poisoning by paracetamol in each of the past five years. [59636]

Mr. Galbraith: The information available is given in the list.

Deaths from poisoning involving paracetamol [1,2] Scotland

1993: 89

1994: 90

1995: 81

1996: 96

1997: 102.

[1] Includes compound preparations containing paracetamol.

[2] Includes cases where paracetamol was taken together with other drugs.

Sheriff Courts

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many summary criminal trials in each Scottish sheriff court have been adjourned on more than one occasion in each of the past four years; [59627]

(2) how many summary criminal trials in each Scottish sheriff court have concluded at the first trial diet; and how many have been adjourned because of pressure of business in each of the past four years. [59628]

Mr. McLeish: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Scottish Court Service to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Ewart to Mr. Donald Gorrie, dated 17 November 1998:

Mr. McLeish has asked me to respond to your question about summary criminal trials. The attached tables show the number of:

Summary cases with one trial diet;

Summary cases with 2 or more trial diets;

Summary trials adjourned through lack of court time for each Sheriff Court over the past years.

I hope this is helpful.

	Summary cases with one trial diet	*Summary cases with two or more trial diets*	*Summary trials adjourned through lack of court time*[1]
1995			
Aberdeen	1,516	390	69
Airdrie	930	360	49
Alloa	294	118	22
Ayr	847	233	17
Arbroath	302	91	3
Banff	77	20	7
Campbeltown	82	61	2
Cupar	223	56	25
Dingwall	147	46	3
Dornoch	69	30	2
Dumbarton	1,009	503	61
Dumfries	606	132	12
Dundee	1,170	386	36
Dunfermline	619	210	32
Dunoon	185	94	8
Duns	55	9	1
Edinburgh	3,876	950	110
Elgin	269	56	14
Falkirk	915	253	43
Forfar	236	73	0
Fort William	174	68	21
Glasgow	6,533	3,072	558
Greenock	669	158	3
Haddington	336	100	6
Hamilton	2,288	1,148	167
Inverness	725	216	13
Jedburgh	118	35	4
Kilmarnock	1,432	94	13
Kirkcaldy	747	240	6
Kirkcudbright	84	19	29
Kirkwall	37	12	0
Lanark	374	140	18

	Summary cases with one trial diet	*Summary cases with two or more trial diets*	*Summary trials adjourned through lack of court time*[1]
Lerwick	75	37	0
Linlithgow	872	307	20
Lochmaddy	52	9	0
Oban	135	39	16
Paisley	1,782	814	239
Peebles	48	21	0
Perth	644	167	34
Peterhead	169	41	9
Portree	43	14	0
Rothesay	65	20	3
Selkirk	103	12	3
Stirling	626	215	50
Stonehaven	174	35	2
Stornoway	82	41	15
Stranraer	228	64	5
Tain	118	43	12
Wick	102	32	3

	Summary cases with one trial diet	*Summary cases with two or more trial diets*	*Summary trials adjourned through lack of court time*[1]
1996			
Aberdeen	1,043	313	79
Airdrie	844	341	114
Alloa	260	84	13
Ayr	815	200	2
Arbroath	266	37	46
Banff	66	25	10
Campbeltown	89	27	5
Cupar	150	65	52
Dingwall	84	195	3
Dornoch	53	37	12
Dumbarton	919	283	60
Dumfries	497	91	4
Dundee	911	399	46
Dunfermline	554	178	39
Dunoon	169	76	20
Duns	61	13	2
Edinburgh	4,206	1,044	223
Elgin	194	44	18
Falkirk	750	281	93
Forfar	160	34	2
Fort William	141	47	30
Glasgow	6,614	2,474	445
Greenock	665	143	14
Haddington	353	84	3
Hamilton	2,276	1,021	278
Inverness	547	168	15
Jedburgh	105	25	13
Kilmarnock	1,204	93	15
Kirkcaldy	671	177	4
Kirkcudbright	92	15	87
Kirkwall	45	8	0
Lanark	356	143	37
Lerwick	83	56	2
Linlithgow	1,040	263	56
Lochmaddy	40	6	0
Oban	107	43	36
Paisley	1,613	708	293
Peebles	34	12	2
Perth	565	182	26
Peterhead	152	41	11
Portree	25	11	0
Rothesay	50	11	0
Selkirk	68	15	2
Stirling	545	241	85
Stonehaven	172	32	23
Stornoway	95	48	26
Stranraer	223	58	9
Tain	91	29	9
Wick	115	18	3

[1] Adjourned through lack of court time; figures available only from 1 April to 31 December 1995

	Summary cases with one trial diet	*Summary cases with two or more trial diets*	*Summary trials adjourned through lack of court time*
1997			
Aberdeen	998	225	58
Airdrie	833	300	31
Alloa	191	72	11
Ayr	754	151	25
Arbroath	245	73	30
Banff	43	15	5
Campbeltown	85	13	0
Cupar	146	55	32
Dingwall	187	55	28
Dornoch	54	25	10
Dumbarton	772	305	60
Dumfries	465	79	6
Dundee	958	368	42
Dunfermline	465	190	48
Dunoon	156	56	25
Duns	40	13	4
Edinburgh	3,804	946	322
Elgin	181	48	9
Falkirk	644	233	43
Forfar	118	28	2
Fort William	110	47	20
Glasgow	4,665	1,729	293
Greenock	563	135	26
Haddington	305	85	8
Hamilton	1,965	848	189
Inverness	384	49	5
Jedburgh	103	26	8
Kilmarnock	1,127	98	23
Kirkcaldy	569	264	0
Kirkcudbright	94	12	104
Kirkwall	49	10	2
Lanark	315	81	39
Lerwick	83	36	1
Linlithgow	671	314	84
Lochmaddy	34	7	3
Oban	113	54	23
Paisley	1,369	497	121
Peebles	29	14	5
Perth	531	196	32
Peterhead	209	62	14
Portree	22	4	0
Rothesay	35	8	2
Selkirk	56	6	0
Stirling	363	156	59
Stonehaven	154	26	9
Stornoway	72	49	8
Stranraer	260	43	9
Tain	82	21	5
Wick	120	38	2

	Summary cases with one trial diet	*Summary cases with two or more trial diets*	*Summary trials adjourned through lack of court time*
1998 to date[1]			
Aberdeen	1,259	218	44
Airdrie	1,127	345	29
Alloa	218	46	6
Ayr	845	168	18
Arbroath	317	102	26
Banff	86	7	0
Campbeltown	79	18	0
Cupar	148	30	14
Dingwall	126	35	3
Dornoch	55	31	13
Dumbarton	864	252	8
Dumfries	428	59	1
Dundee	1,144	409	48
Dunfermline	414	93	11
Dunoon	122	47	14
Duns	34	0	0

	Summary cases with one trial diet	*Summary cases with two or more trial diets*	*Summary trials adjourned through lack of court time*
Edinburgh	3,875	1,191	285
Elgin	323	68	18
Falkirk	663	163	31
Forfar	111	29	5
Fort William	76	27	4
Glasgow	5,371	1,504	69
Greenock	621	92	16
Haddington	312	56	0
Hamilton	1,745	757	70
Inverness	504	88	18
Jedburgh	95	12	0
Kilmarnock	1,068	71	7
Kirkcaldy	506	268	0
Kirkcudbright	68	11	81
Kirkwall	49	13	0
Lanark	309	68	16
Lerwick	85	18	1
Linlithgow	696	241	44
Lochmaddy	34	6	0
Oban	83	23	7
Paisley	1,393	422	63
Peebles	44	8	1
Perth	647	217	33
Peterhead	273	68	23
Portree	16	3	0
Rothesay	36	9	0
Selkirk	86	8	1
Stirling	373	104	20
Stonehaven	118	16	0
Stornoway	87	21	0
Stranraer	236	42	1
Tain	146	28	9
Wick	85	31	0

[1] 1998 figures cover the period 1 January to 9 October 1998

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Coalfields Task Force

9. **Dr. Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he can report on implementing the recommendations of the coalfields task force. [58612]

Mr. Prescott: I will launch the Government's response to the Coalfields Task Force Report at the Second Coalfields Conference on Tuesday 1 December at the Peterlee Leisure Centre in County Durham. Copies of the written responses will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Leylandii

10. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation relating to Leylandii and other fast-growing trees. [58613]

Mr. Meale: We are considering whether there is a need for Government intervention in relation to problems caused by leylandii trees and other high garden hedges. We will announce our conclusions in due course.

Council Tax

11. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the need to review council tax rates for *(a)* second and *(b)* mobile homes. [58614]

Ms Armstrong: On 30 July we published our Local Government White Paper—"Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People". In this we explained that the council tax is working well as a local tax and that it has been widely accepted. In reviewing council tax, we had to balance the expense and potential great disruption of a revaluation against various proposals for change. We have concluded that the current valuation base remains broadly acceptable, and is likely to remain so for the next few years. While we shall be keeping the fairness of the council tax under review we do not propose to change the council tax levels for second homes or mobile homes during the course of this Parliament.

28. **Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the current arrangements for levying council tax on second homes. [58639]

Ms Armstrong: In response to the consultation paper on local government finance, we received 40 representations on second homes. Since the election, we have also received an additional 121 representations on second homes. Of the representations received, 118 were in favour of not applying the 50 per cent. reduction for second homes and 43 were in favour of retaining the reduction.

Capital Receipts

12. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the capital receipts programme on housing to date. [58615]

Mr. Prescott: Having a decent home for everyone is a goal of a civilised society. We promised to release funds to restore and build new houses for rent, and that is what we are doing. Capital allocations of around £750 million have been made available to local authorities under the Capital Receipts Initiative in 1997–98 and 1998–99. I have today placed information in the Libraries of both Houses on the capital receipts allocations for Local Authorities in England for 1997–98 and 1998–99.

20. **Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the capital receipts programme in the London region to date. [58623]

26. **Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the capital receipts programme in the London region to date. [58630]

Mr. Raynsford: Under the Capital Receipts Initiative, London has received £220 million in 1997–98 and 1998–99. On average, around 70 per cent. of these resources will be spent by local authorities on renovations to their own housing stock, benefiting over 100,000 dwellings. Approximately 40 per cent. of this work will include energy efficiency improvements. The resources will also help to finance the building or acquisition of around 1,000 extra dwellings.

Business Taxes

13. **Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has had from the business community regarding his proposals for new business taxes. [58616]

Mr. Raynsford: Since the publication of the White Paper "Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People", we have discussed the proposals for local business rates with representatives of a number of business organisations.

Local Government Reform

14. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans to reform the structure of local government. [58617]

Ms Armstrong: As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister told the House when announcing our White Paper on modern local government, on 30 July 1998, *Oficial Report*, columns 529–46, on 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 529–41, our programme of reform today is about how councils work and how they can be more in touch with the people whom they serve. We have seen over the past few years what a distraction boundary and structure changes can be.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

15. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's actions to meet the carbon dioxide reductions agreed at Kyoto. [58618]

Mr. Meacher: On 26 October the UK became one of the first developed countries to launch a consultation exercise on policy options for meeting its climate change targets. The paper lists the steps the Government have already taken and sets out in detail further options.

Local Government Finance

16. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure a more equal level of funding for local authorities in England. [58619]

Mr. Raynsford: We made a commitment to a fair distribution of grant for all authorities. We shall make changes only where we are convinced that it would be fair to do so and in keeping with our policy priorities.

Opencast Coal Mining

17. **Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what response he has had to the announcement of new planning guidance governing opencast coal mining. [58620]

Mr. Caborn: I published draft revised planning guidance on coal extraction in England on 16 October. Comments are requested by 15 January 1999. As yet we have received very few responses.

Children's Parliament

18. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the purpose of the Children's Parliament. [58621]

Mr. Prescott: The purpose of the Children's Parliament on the Environment is two-fold: first, to build on the interest that young people have in the environment and to stimulate them to think about what can be done, and in particular what they can do themselves, to secure a healthy future for everybody; and, secondly, to provide children with an opportunity to develop an understanding of, and take an active role in, the democratic process, and to understand their duties, responsibilities and rights as citizens.

Housing Revenue Account

19. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total amount paid from housing revenue account surpluses in housing benefits to council house tenants in the last financial year. [58622]

Mr. Raynsford: Our latest information is that £1.226 billion of housing element surpluses in the Housing Revenue Account was used to offset the cost of rent rebates in 1997–98.

Capital Allocation System

21. **Mr. Gorrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the capital allocation system. [58624]

Ms Armstrong: Following the publication of the capital finance consultation paper "Modernising local government: capital finance", we received 353 responses from the English local authority community, 27 from organisations representing local authorities, 4 from business and their representative organisations and 40 from others with an interest in local government including members of the public and academics. The vast majority of these responses concerned the capital allocation system.

Representations on the capital allocation in Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Standard Spending Assessments (London)

22. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the formula for the computation of standard spending assessments for London borough councils. [58625]

Mr. Raynsford: We have been considering a range of suggested changes to the calculation of Standard Spending Assessments, taking account of discussions that have taken place this year with local government representatives, to ensure a fair distribution among all authorities.

Countryside Access

23. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received on access to the countryside for walkers. [58626]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has received over 2,000 formal responses to our consultation paper "Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales". In addition, since the closing date for responses to the consultation

paper on 5 June, approximately 340 letters have been received from members of the public on this subject, and approximately 230 letters from Members of Parliament. Ministerial colleagues and I have held meetings recently with organisations representing both landowners and recreational users.

Sellafield

24. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the recent Environment Agency proposed decision concerning the MOX plant at Sellafield. [58627]

Mr. Meale: The Agency's draft determination was received in my Department on 2 November 1998. Requests have been made to Ministers to call in the application for their own determination. These requests are being considered carefully and my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will announce their decision as soon as they are able to do so.

Regional Bodies (South-East)

25. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to promote the public accountability of the Government's regional bodies in the south-east. [58628]

Mr. Caborn: We are committed to improving the openness, accountability and effectiveness of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). The South East Regional Development Agency—like other Regional Development Agencies—will be required to take into account the views of, and give an account of its activities to, the South East Regional Chamber which will represent those in the region with an interest in its work.

Affordable Housing

27. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans to increase the supply of affordable housing. [58631]

Mr. Raynsford: We are making available nearly £5 billion extra for investment in housing over the lifetime of this Parliament. The majority of these resources are being directed through local authorities, who we expect to take investment decisions that reflect local needs and priorities. Where demand for affordable housing is high, local authorities may use a proportion of their resources to provide new social lettings. We have also boosted the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme relative to the spending plans of the last Government, thereby ensuring that it will continue to play a key part in support of social housing provision, complementing local authority housing strategies.

Our revised Planning Circular on affordable housing (6/98) will enable local planning authorities to increase the supply of affordable housing secured through the planning process.

Ports Policy

36. **Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what response the Government have made to the EU Transport Commissioner's EU Green Paper on ports policy. [58642]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The European Commission issued its Green Paper on ports last December. We published a detailed response at the end of March 1998, setting out our broad support for the Commission's proposals for establishing fair competition between European ports. Copies of our response are in the Library of the House.

Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road

37. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will visit Heald Green, Bramhall, Hazel Grove and Woodford to study the effects of cancelling the completion of the Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road. [58643]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Roads Review led us to conclude that further consideration was necessary of the transport pressures around the airport and to the south-east of Manchester. We therefore proposed a study, which will look at potentials for increased use of public transport and address the problem of through traffic, while not encouraging further car commuting.

Cycling

38. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress the Government are making towards its target in respect of cycling by 2002. [58644]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The target of doubling the number of trips by bicycle by the end of 2002, and doubling them again by the end of 2012, was established by the National Cycling Strategy. In the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", we endorsed that target. Good progress is being made in implementing the Strategy.

Integrated Transport Strategy

39. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what part parkway stations play in his integrated transport strategy. [58645]

Dr. Reid: Carefully designed park and ride schemes can contribute to more sustainable transport. Local authorities should consider the potential of park and ride, as part of a package of traffic management measures, when preparing their local transport plans.

Railtrack

41. **Dr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement regarding the permitted development rights of Railtrack. [58647]

Mr. Raynsford: The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 grants planning permission for classes of development described in Schedule 2 to the Order. No specific application for planning permission is required. Part 11 grants permission

for development authorised under local or private Acts or Orders subject to conditions. Part 17 grants permission for certain development by statutory undertakers, including development by railway undertakers on their operational land required in connection with the movement of traffic by rail. The question of permitted development rights and Railtrack is currently before the Secretary of State in relation to the Hinksey Sidings site in Oxford.

Rail Industry

42. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what further action his Department is taking to improve the performance of the rail industry. [58648]

Dr. Reid: We recently announced the creation of a shadow Strategic Rail Authority to get a grip on the rail industry. We have called all franchisees and Railtrack to a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and me on 26 November to identify solutions to their current poor performance.

Strategic Rail Authority

43. **Jacqui Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what remit the shadow strategic rail authority will have. [58649]

Dr. Reid: The shadow Strategic Rail Authority, to be formed by close working between the British Railways Board and the Franchising Director, will be operational by Spring 1999. It will lead changes to the way the privatised railway is controlled, in advance of legislation to establish the SRA on a statutory basis. We will announce the remit of the shadow SRA in due course.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

44. **Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to ensure that the north-west region benefits from the channel tunnel rail link. [58650]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The deal which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 367–84, secured the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link which will deliver economic, transport and environmental benefits for the whole country.

North-West Trains

45. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take action to prevent reductions in services by North-West trains. [58651]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Train operators are contractually committed to maintain an agreed minimum level of service in their Passenger Service Requirement (PSR), which is a key component of the franchise agreement. These minimum levels are broadly based on those that were operated prior to privatisation. To deviate would put the train operator in breach of its contract. Where additional services above the PSR have been added for commercial reasons, operators have the freedom to reduce them, after informing the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and rail user groups.

Cleaner Vehicles

46. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce measures to encourage the purchase of more fuel-efficient, less polluting cars. [58652]

Dr. Reid: The Government have already introduced fiscal measures including fuel duty incentives and are consulting on a lower rate of Vehicle Excise Duty to encourage less environmentally damaging cars. We have also supported more stringent European vehicle emission and fuel quality standards and welcome the recent voluntary agreement from motor manufacturers to improve the fuel efficiency of new cars. The market for less polluting vehicles will be further stimulated through the Cleaner Vehicle Task Force, a partnership between the Government and the private sector to promote environmentally friendly vehicles people will want to drive and buy.

Regional Airports

47. **Mr. Alan Johnson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what future role he envisages for regional airports. [58653]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We promised in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" that, taking account of the emerging findings of a series of regional air services studies, we would encourage the growth of regional airports to meet local demand for air travel where consistent with sustainable development principles. The aim is to maximise the contribution which regional airports make to local and regional economies, to relieve pressure on congested airports in the south-east of England and to reduce the need for long surface journeys, particularly by road, to south-east airports. The south-west England study was already under way when the White Paper was published and the Welsh study is now also under way. Work on setting up the other four studies is in hand. We announced last week the details of our proposals to free soundly financed local authority airports from public sector borrowing controls. The new financial regime will come into effect, subject to Parliamentary approval, on 1 April 1999 and we have invited applications from those airport companies which wish to benefit from the new freedom.

Connex South Central

48. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve commuter services on lines operated by Connex South Central. [58654]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In August the Franchising Director asked each train operating company to submit to him an action plan indicating how they intend to improve performance. Connex South Central has submitted an action plan which the Franchising Director is currently reviewing. We have announced our intention to establish a Strategic Rail Authority which will be responsible for overseeing the performance of the franchise agreements and the strategic development of the rail network. In any new or re-negotiated franchise contracts we expect to see much better performance requirements and arrangements to enable passengers to hold operators responsible for the services they run. We also propose to amend the Railways

Act so that financial penalties for poor performance can be imposed much faster, and infringements penalised. Ministers are to meet with representatives from all train operating companies on 26 November to discuss future railways policy and in particular ways of improving poor performance generally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many routes operated by Connex South Central the punctuality of rail services *(a)* improved and *(b)* deteriorated in the last period for which figures are available. [60296]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The latest figures released by the Franchising Director cover the three rail industry periods from 28 June 1998 to 19 September 1998. The Connex South Central franchise is split into two route groups—South London lines and Sussex Coast for the purpose of performance monitoring. Comparing the annual average at the end of September 1997 with the annual average at the end of September 1998, both route groups improved. Copies of the Franchising Director's latest report—issued on 4 November—are in the House Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *116*, concerning Connex South Central, if, when Ministers meet Connex South Central, he will ensure that the company puts in place an action plan to improve services in the coming winter. [60301]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director has required all train operating companies to produce and implement an action plan setting out how they propose to deliver improvements in performance. These have been received and are being evaluated. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will be meeting representatives from the train operating companies on 26 November, and will impress the importance of delivering improved performance on them then.

Road Freight Hauliers

49. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from road freight hauliers regarding the impact of the proposals in the White Paper on integrated transport strategy on their industry. [58655]

Dr. Reid: The industry is generally satisfied with the Government's approach to sustainable distribution as set out in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone".

This Government's policy towards the haulage industry is to promote an industry which is sustainable, which is efficient and effective and which meets the Government's environmental and social objectives at the same time.

For example, industry has welcomed the fact that 40 tonne 5-axle lorries will be allowed for domestic use as well as for international movements. Industry has endorsed our intention to improve enforcement in the industry through improvements in the efficiency of the enforcement agencies. We are ensuring that modern IT systems are introduced which will allow better co-ordination and sharing of data between the agencies. They have endorsed our intention to impound illegally operated vehicles used by cowboy operators. The industry has been very constructive in helping us to formulate these proposals. Such a scheme will help to ensure that, within the UK, hauliers operate within a competitive regime which is both fair and honest.

Leisure Craft

50. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact the new Maritime and Coastguard Agency will have on leisure craft. [58656]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On 7 October, at the official launch of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), I announced the Government's continuing commitment to improve the safety of recreational craft. The MCA will develop a voluntary Code of Conduct for all recreational craft which will include best practice and a voluntary registration and identification scheme. The Agency will also continue safety education initiatives. The Code will be developed by the Sea Safety Liaison Group which, in addition to the MCA, comprises representatives of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Royal Yachting Association, the Royal Life Saving Society UK and the British Marine Industries Federation and will be subject to external consultation before being launched next Summer.

In due course the Government also intend to pursue the primary legislation needed to enable local authorities to have better control, through byelaws, of their coastal waters.

I believe this strategy will do a great deal to improve the safety of the increasing numbers of people who use our coastal waters for recreation.

Community Transport Schemes

51. **Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the costs of implementing a comprehensive nationwide network of community transport schemes. [58657]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have commissioned a major review of voluntary and community transport nationwide. The review, which was carried out in collaboration with the Community Transport Association, has looked at both the range and the scope of work currently undertaken by voluntary and community transport operators and at what measures should be considered to enable them to deliver their invaluable services most effectively. A report will be published early in the New Year.

Vehicles (Safety Checks)

40. **Mr. Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of the Government's policy on safety checks on the roadworthiness of vehicles. [58646]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government's policy is to require vehicles to undergo periodical tests for roadworthiness and for exhaust emissions. This contributes towards well-maintained, safe vehicles and relatively low levels of pollution.

Rural Areas (Parliamentary Representation)

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his

oral statement of 20 October 1998, *Official Report*, column 1062, on what definition of rural areas his statement that more Labour Members than Conservative Members represent rural areas was based. [57958]

Ms Armstrong: There are more Labour Members of Parliament representing the non-metropolitan counties of England than there are Conservative MPs representing similar constituencies. There are no Conservative MPs representing any rural or urban constituencies in Scotland and no Conservative MPs representing any urban or rural constituencies in Wales.

Compensation Claims

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the latest year for which figures are available. [59054]

Mr. Meale: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy in the Library.

Supermarket Developments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received from supermarket chains regarding planning policy for supermarket store developments. [58884]

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State has received a number of letters from representatives of the retail sector, but has had no direct representations about planning policy for supermarket store developments. My colleague the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning and I have met representatives of the retail sector recently.

M65 (Blackburn)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons resurfacing work is being carried out on parts of the M65 at Blackburn. [59473]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 17 November 1998:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, Glenda Jackson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the M65 at Blackburn.

Small areas of the road surface of the M65 Blackburn Southern Bypass have proved to be sub-standard and have had to be replaced for safety reasons. The problems only became apparent after traffic started to use the road, which was opened in December 1997.

The cost of the work was met by the Contractor who originally constructed the Motorway.

The work was carried out at night to keep inconvenience to traffic to a minimum and was completed in the early hours of Friday 13 November.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate was made of the final construction cost of the Jubilee Line Extension in each year since the project was started. [59588]

Ms Glenda Jackson: At project go-ahead in October 1993, the project was expected to cost £1.9 billion plus a further £219 million on improvements to the core network related to the JLE project. This estimate remained unchanged until August 1995 when cost increases were identified, bringing the total to £2.3 billion. In 1996 a revised forecast of £2.69 billion was made. This increased to £2.76 billion in 1997. London Transport's latest estimate of final cost is £2.85 billion, but this is being reviewed, having regard to the rephased programme for line opening in 1999.

Drinking and Driving

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to be in a position to publish the responses to his Department's consultation document on tightening the laws relating to drinking and driving; and if he will make a statement as to what action he proposes to take. [59700]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We shall make an announcement when we have finished considering the responses to our consultation exercise.

Childhood Cancers

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the degree of correlation between the incidence of childhood cancers and proximity to industrial sites. [59609]

Mr. Meale: The Small Area Health Statistics Unit at the Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine has carried out a number of studies of cancer incidence and mortality around industrial sites at the request of Government Departments. A study of lympho-haematopoietic cancers around all industrial complexes in Great Britain which include major oil refineries specifically examined rates in children aged 0 to 14 years of age. It found no evidence of association between residence near oil refineries and the overall incidence of lymphatic and haematopoietic malignancies in this age group.

The results of this work are due to be published early next year and a copy will be placed in the House Library.

Visual Display Units

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to require the manufacturers and retailers of visual display units to affix to the front of the screen surround a notice advising users of the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992. [59653]

Mr. Meale: There are no plans to require manufacturers and retailers of visual display units to affix any information about the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 to the front of the screen surround. The Regulations place duties on employers rather than on manufacturers or suppliers. Employers are required to provide health and safety

information and training to all their employees who habitually use display screen equipment as a significant part of their normal work.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to publicise more widely the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, Guidance on Regulations and Supplementary Practical Advice Guide. [59654]

Mr. Meale: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has recently revised and reissued its free guidance booklet "Working with VDUs". Since February, over 174,000 free copies have been sent out and over 25,000 priced packs of 10 leaflets have been sold. "Working with VDUs" includes details of HSE's comprehensive priced guidance on the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 and explains how to obtain copies. In addition, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Inspectors and Local Authority Enforcement Officers raise awareness of the Regulations and guidance during their inspections of workplaces.

Railway Property Maintenance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to extend the duties to clean railway stations and other railway property under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to companies which took over responsibility for maintenance of property previously managed by British Rail. [59614]

Ms Glenda Jackson: An Order to place a duty on the privatised railway companies to clear litter from their land will be laid before Parliament early in the new year.

Coastguards

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the dates during the last six months when there was no officer on duty at Tyne-Tees coastguard station qualified above the rank of coastguard watch assistant. [59886]

Ms Glenda Jackson: During the last six months, there has been no period when the watch complement at the Tyne-Tees coastguard station fell below the required criteria.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the aircraft movements at Heathrow airport between midnight and 7 a.m. on Christmas morning 1997, indicating *(a)* airline, *(b)* aircraft, *(c)* origin or destination and schedule and *(d)* actual times of arrival and departure. [60185]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information from Heathrow Airport Ltd is as follows:

Arrivals—25 December 1997

Airline	*Aircraft Type*	*Origin*	*Actual Time of Arrival (ATA)* [1]	*Scheduled Time of Arrival (STA)* [2]
Gama Aviation	Ciation	Dublin	0132	0200
Virgin Atlantic	A340	Hong Kong	0407	0415
British Airways	B747	Hong Kong	0415	0450
British Airways	B747	Hong Kong	0418	0435
British Airways	B777	Riyadh	0428	0455
British Airways	B777	Boston	0500	0520
Cathay Pacific	B747	Hong Kong	0503	0515
British Airways	B747	Kuala Lumpur	0505	0525
British Airways	B747	Johannesburg	0515	0525
British Airways	B747	Singapore	0518	0535
British Airways	B747	Bangkok	0524	0540
Qantas	B747	Singapore	0528	0530
Singapore Airlines	B747	Singapore	0532	0530
Saudia	B747	Riyadh	0551	0545
British Airways	B777	Dhahran	0600	0625
American Airlines	A300	New York	0602	0620
British Airways	B747	Cape Town	0603	0620
Virgin Atlantic	A340	Johannesburg	0605	0635
Malaysian Airlines	B747	Kuala Lumpur	0607	0555
EL AL	B757	Tel Aviv	0608	0620
British Airways	B777	Kuwait	0610	0620
Thai Airways	B747	Bangkok	0618	0620
Canadian Airlines	DC10	Toronto	0620	0625
British Airways	B747	Singapore	0622	0620
Cathay Pacific	B747	Paris	0624	0630
Air Canada	B747	Montreal	0625	0645
British Airways	B747	New York	0627	0700
Air Canada	B747	Toronto	0628	0640
Qantas	B747	Bangkok	0630	0630
British Airways	B747	Bombay	0632	0650
United Airlines	B777	San Francisco	0634	0640
Vigin Atlantic	B747	Miami	0636	0655
Gulf Air	A340	Bahrain	0638	0620
United Airlines	B777	Washington	0639	0630
American Airlines	B767	New York	0641	0650
British Airways	B777	Bahrain	0642	0700

Arrivals—25 December 1997

Airline	*Aircraft Type*	*Origin*	*Actual Time of Arrival (ATA)* [1]	*Scheduled Time of Arrival (STA)* [2]
British Airways	B737	Paris	0644	0655
British Airways	B747	Washington	0646	0645
United Airlines	B767	New York	0647	0655
British Airways	B777	Dubai	0650	0625
Virgin Atlantic	B747	New York	0652	0710
South African	B747	Cape Town	0657	0655

[1] Actual Time of Arrival—time of touchdown of aircraft.
[2] Scheduled Time of Arrival—refers to the time the aircraft was scheduled to reach the stand after taxiing from the runway exit.

There were no departures during the period midnight and 0700.

Of the above landings between midnight and 0600, all of the flights except for the Citation (a small business jet) counted against the movements limit and against the noise quota, in accordance with the night flying restrictions.

Teesside Development Corporation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *114–15*, for what reasons the names of the companies which submitted bids for Teesside Development Corporation equipment are commercially confidential. [59864]

Mr. Meale: The firms that submitted the bids would have presumed that they were tendering on a commercially confidential basis, in accordance with normal practice. It would be improper for me to release their names without their approval.

Radioactive Gases (Cap La Hague)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what evaluation he has made of the spread of radioactive gases over the South Coast from the French nuclear power station at Cap La Hague. [60107]

Mr. Meale: No specific evaluation of the kind referred to has been made. The Government are not aware of any unauthorised release of radioactive gases from a French nuclear installation which might have affected the South Coast of England. The UK would be notified of any such incident by the French authorities, under the terms of a bilateral agreement. In addition, any elevation in the background levels of radioactivity in the UK would be detected by the RIMNET network of continuously operating gamma dose rate monitors, many of which are located along the South Coast and in the Channel Islands.

Routine aerial releases of radioactivity from the reprocessing plant at Cap La Hague and other sites in France are subject to stringent controls by the French competent authority, to ensure that the levels of radioactivity to which the public are exposed are below safety levels set by the European Union and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Under Article 37 of the Euratom Treaty, the European Commission must be satisfied that no contamination of another Member State will result, before any routine releases of radioactivity can be authorised. Environmental monitoring programmes carried out in southern England and the Channel Islands have detected no elevated levels of radioactivity.

Local Government Debt

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to reduce the level of local government debt. [59856]

Ms Armstrong: Local authorities' new borrowing is regulated by the issue of credit approvals, in accordance with the policy established by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Under this Act, authorities also have a statutory duty to make provision to meet their existing debts. It is for them to decide whether it would be prudent to repay any loan before they are contractually required to do so. Incentives to reduce the level of debt include the greater freedom for debt-free authorities to spend their capital receipts.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60081]

Mr. Meale: The Department and its agencies report fully on problems arising from millennium compliance in the quarterly review process organised by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council. As part of the initial planning process, possible problems were identified, corrective action put in hand and in many cases work is complete. All remedial work has been prioritised with business critical areas being tackled first. Information on specific problems, priorities and progress will be found in the copies of departments' plans which have been published in the Library of the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement; [60082]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its

agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [60080]

Mr. Meale: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector including CAA, London Transport, the Environment Agency and Local Authorities. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of Departments' plans which have been published in the Library of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library of the House and on the Internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60083]

Mr. Meale: I am mindful of the advice given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to Cabinet Colleagues and members of MISC4 in October in response to the PAC recommendations. DETR, its agencies and associated public bodies have been asked to review their existing contingency plans to take account of possible problems arising from millennium compliance. It is my intention that they will have completed risk assessments and have initial Year 2000 business continuity plans in place by the end of January 1999.

Airline Safety

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what guidance he has issued to the Civil Aviation Authority concerning the responsibilities of UK airlines safely to transport exceptionally tall people; [59603]

(2) what representations he has received relating to the responsibilities of UK airlines in respect of the safe transport of exceptionally tall people. [59602]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have not received any representations about the responsibilities of UK airlines in respect of the safe transport of exceptionally tall people.

The detailed safety regulation of aircraft and their operations is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The CAA has set minimum requirements relating to the spacing of passenger seats for UK registered aircraft and carries out regular checks to ensure compliance.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to prevent airlines from charging a premium to passengers requesting the allocation of emergency exit row seats. [59604]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The practice of charging a premium for allocating specific seats to passengers, particularly on charter flights, is essentially a commercial issue for the airlines and provided the seat spacing does not fall below that stipulated by the Civil Aviation Authority, the Government would not wish to intervene.

Pigeon Proofing

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on Railtrack's responsibilities with regard to the pigeon proofing of bridges. [59866]

Ms Glenda Jackson: While Railtrack is responsible for the safety and general condition of their railway bridges, the main responsibility for minimising the nuisance and mess caused by pigeons rests with the local authorities. Railtrack has in the past entered into agreements to provide anti-pigeon netting, providing the local authority is willing to bear the cost of the project. For operational reasons (urgent safety works may require Railtrack to remove the netting) any installation is subject to a legal agreement.

Multiple Occupation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish for consultation the national mandatory licensing scheme for buildings in multiple occupation. [60269]

Mr. Raynsford: We hope to publish a consultation document on our proposals for a national mandatory licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation early next year.

Roads (Noise Abatement)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ring-fence money provided for the Highways Agency to carry out noise abatement measures on existing roads; when he expects to announce how much will be provided; and if he will make a statement. [59598]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We announced our intention to establish a ring-fenced budget and revised criteria for this purpose in "A New deal for Trunk Roads in England". Work on this is currently in hand and we shall make a full announcement as soon as possible.

Parish Council Audits

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the average charge made by the District Auditor on behalf of the Audit Commission to carry out audits of parish councils' yearly accounts; what percentage this charge represents of the average annual precept for parish councils; what options for redress are open to parish councils in the case of disputes over audit fees; and if he will make a statement. [59599]

Mr. Raynsford: The average audit fee for the audit of parish councils' accounts was £175 in 1997–98 which represents some 1.25 per cent. of the average annual precept of parish councils in England. The number of hours required for any audit are agreed between the

auditor and the audited body at the time of the audit. The first option for redress for a parish council would be to discuss the matter with the auditor. Subsequently they should pursue any complaint through the formal procedure operated by the Audit Commission.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment will be looking retrospectively at all the genetically modified crop approvals given to date in the light of its new remit. [59751]

Mr. Meale: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked ACRE to look at not only direct and indirect effects of releasing genetically modified organisms but also the possible resultant changes in agronomic practice and subsequent effects of biodiversity. This will apply only to applications to market GM crops for cultivation in the UK. When the results are known of the farm-scale ecological monitoring we will be asking ACRE to consider whether there are any implications for approvals given to date.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if companies are still required to give information about the progress of a genetically modified crop to his Department after the crop has been given marketing consent by his Department. [59749]

Mr. Meale: Companies are required to inform my Department if new information becomes available concerning the risk assessment on which the original marketing consent was based.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the monitoring of genetically modified crops; and if he will ensure that this includes the monitoring of gene transfers. [59753]

Mr. Meale: All experimental releases of GM crops must be monitored by consent holders, and reports must be submitted to my Department on the outcome of the monitoring. In addition, my Department is funding the monitoring of releases of Plant Genetics Systems' herbicide tolerant oilseed rape which is being grown in the UK under a marketing consent for seed production only. This work is being carried out by the National Institute for Agricultural Botany and includes monitoring for evidence for gene transfer. Other genetically modified crops will be included in this programme when they enter commercial production.

Negotiations are now underway on the European Commission's proposal for amending Directive 90/220 on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms to the environment. The Government support the proposals for post-market monitoring of GMO products including monitoring for gene transfers.

At the House of Lords Select Committee, my right. hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced his intention to allow farm scale plantings of GM crops to take place in order to carry out ecological monitoring. The Government are still in the early stages of developing the specifications for how the ecological monitoring will be carried out.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what acreage of the genetically modified oilseed rape (Ref. 95/ml/1) marketed by Plant Genetic Systems Ltd has been licensed to be grown on a commercial scale in the United Kingdom. [59750]

Mr. Meale: The genetically modified oilseed rape developed by Plant Genetic Systems has been granted a consent for commercial seed production only. No specific acreage has been licensed by the Secretary of State for growth in the UK.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the earliest dates that herbicide-tolerant or insect-resistant crops could have been grown legally in the UK. [59752]

Mr. Meale: Legislation has permitted the growing of genetically modified crops, under consent from the Secretary of State, since February 1993. They could have been grown prior to this under the Genetic Manipulation Regulations 1989 and a voluntary agreement covering risks to the environment. The first release of a GM crop under this scheme was in 1987.

New Forest (Car Parking)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will give a decision on the appeal by New Forest District Council against Hampshire County Council on the question of car parking charges which the Government Office of the South East has referred to him. [60164]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A decision will be issued shortly.

Traffic Congestion (Southend)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of traffic congestion within Southend-on-Sea; and if he will promote a bypass road from Shoeburyness to the A127. [58635]

Ms Glenda Jackson: These are both matters which are the responsibility of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Essex County Council. Essex County Council have withdrawn their proposal for a £75 million road and both authorities are now pursuing sustainable transport solutions in the South East Essex package.

Night Flights

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to issue detailed proposals on the next night restrictions regime for Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted; and what his plans are for consulting on the introduction of runway alternation at night at Heathrow and the continuance of westerly preference at night. [60384]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is the second consultation in the two-stage process announced earlier this year on 27 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *404*.

Part 1 of this consultation invites comments on detailed proposals for future night restrictions at the three airports. Part 2 deals with Heathrow only, and invites views on options for the possible introduction of night-time runway alternation and on changing westerly preference at night.

It also includes a summary of the assessment of the continuing trial procedure for landings over London in the early morning. The Government wish to consider all responses to Part 2 before reaching a view.

In developing these proposals we have taken into account the responses received to the preliminary consultation paper. We have sought to strike the right balance between the need to protect local communities from excessive aircraft noise at night and the need to allow air services to operate at night where they benefit the local, regional and national economy.

A ban on night flights is not considered practicable but further steps are proposed to restrict operations by the noisiest types of aircraft at night and to encourage the use of quieter types.

Our aim is to put in place arrangements which, over time, will bring about improvements in the noise climate during the night quota period (11.30 pm-6.00 am) around Gatwick, and further improvements around Heathrow. We also wish to provide for the planned development of Stansted, broadly as envisaged in 1993, while maintaining and strengthening the incentive for airlines to use quieter aircraft.

The main proposals are:

- to reduce the seasonal noise quotas for Heathrow to nearer the level of current usage, in order to safeguard the improvements in the night quota period achieved since 1993;
- to reduce the seasonal noise quotas for Gatwick from winter 2001–02 onwards and to balance the movement limits *pro rata* per season, from winter 1999–2000 onwards;
- to increase the Stansted noise quotas gradually from winter 1999–2000 onwards, while maintaining the incentive for airlines to use quieter aircraft;
- to ban aircraft classified QC/4 in the noise quota count (QC) system from being scheduled to land or take off during the quota restricted period from the start of the 2002 summer season at all three airports, subject to the technical reviews of the quota count system; and
- to reduce to 5 per cent. the amount of end of season flexibility permitted, except when there are calendar reasons for retaining 10 per cent.

Copies of the consultation paper will be placed in the House Library. The closing date for responses to the consultation is 12 February 1999.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on the economic development activities of local authorities of the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment. [59533]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Following the French withdrawal last month from the negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in the OECD, it appears most unlikely that the Agreement will be concluded.

The Department looked closely at the possible impact of the draft MAI on local government activity, in consultation with the Local Government Association. We reached the conclusion that there should be no conflict between the broad principles of the MAI and the social and economic development objectives of local governments. However, there were some respects in which we felt that the draft text required greater clarity in order to provide increased certainty.

PRIME MINISTER

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Prime Minister what plans there are for a ministerial visit to St. Helena. [59436]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* At present there are no plans for a Ministerial visit to St. Helena.

All elected members of the St. Helena Legislative Council have visited the UK during the last year at the invitation of the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd). While they were here they were able to meet a number of British Government Ministers.

Senior officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development visit St. Helena regularly. The next visit by officials will be in December to review the three year Country Policy Plan and the Government's £26 million aid grant.

"Europe in Ten Points"

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's input into section A, People's Europe, in the European Communities document "Europe in Ten Points"; and what discussions were held on the subject during the recent Heads of Government meeting at Pörtschach. [59996]

The Prime Minister: The present Government made no contribution to the pamphlet "Europe in Ten Points".

The meeting of Heads at Pörtschach was an informal meeting in preparation for the full European council in Vienna, at which a broad range of issues were discussed. No formal decisions were taken. There was discussion of how to enhance democratic legitimacy, make a reality of subsidiarity and improve the efficiency of the Community institutions.

Millennium

Mr. Brady: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has made for a specific Minister in each Department to be on duty at midnight on 31 December 1999 to deal with emergencies arising from the millennium bug. [59908]

The Prime Minister: In line with the practice of the previous administration, the Civil Contingencies Committee (previously the Civil Contingency Unit) is always on standby for any emergency event which warrants a contribution from central Government. The existence of the Year 2000 problem is of course one of the matters which the Civil Contingencies Committee has taken into account in its planning arrangements.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Prime Minister how he will ensure that essential services are able to maintain adequate staffing levels on New Year's Eve 1999. [59855]

The Prime Minister: Individual Ministers are responsible for ensuring that their departments have plans in place to deal with possible Year 2000 failures. Where appropriate, these plans will make provision for essential staff to be on duty over New Year's Eve 1999.

Across the wider public sector, Chief Executives of Local Authorities and NHS Trusts, and Chief Police and Fire Officers will be responsible for ensuring that staff are on duty on New Year's Eve 1999.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will send a delegation of officials to Iraq to discuss the areas of disagreement between the UK and Iraq. [60090]

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions Her Majesty's Government have held with Arab states aimed at obtaining overflying rights in the event of an attack on Iraq. [60228]

The Prime Minister: We regularly discuss these and other bilateral matters with Arab states.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will investigate allegations that *(a)* Polish and *(b)* other members of UNSCOM have provided information to the US on the location of possible targets for attack. [60198]

The Prime Minister: This is a matter for UNSCOM. I am, however, aware that UNSCOM has dismissed these allegations as groundless. I am satisfied that UNSCOM has been operating in accordance with its mandate from the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the German Foreign Minister's statement in a *Die Zeit* interview that an attack on Iraq would mean that UN weapons inspectors would be unable to return to Iraq for a long time. [60199]

The Prime Minister: The ultimate aim of our policy, and that would include any use of military force against Iraq, is the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. We attach great importance to UNSCOM and IAEA being able to carry out their work effectively.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister what child care provision is made available by his Office for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this child care; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59720]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* For the purpose of this question, my office is part of the Cabinet Office.

Staff in the Department, with children between the ages of 5 and 12, may use the Westminster Holiday Playscheme during the school half terms and major holidays.

Six programmes within the Westminster Holiday Playscheme ran in the financial year 1996–97 and six ran in the financial year 1997–98. The cost borne by Cabinet Office parents in total in the financial year 1996–97 was £1,789.25 and the number who used the scheme was 28. The cost to parents in the financial year 1997–98 was £2,056.79 and the number who used the scheme was 45. The proportion of total staff who used the playscheme in the financial year 1996–97 was 2.8 per cent. and in the financial year 1997–98 it was 4 per cent.

The Department places great importance on maintaining and developing a wide range of family friendly policies. Child care is just one element of these policies. Others include maternity leave at full pay, career breaks of up to five years, special leave to help those caring for elderly dependants, five days' paid paternity pay and special leave for domestic emergencies. In addition staff are able to claim help with additional child care costs associated with activities such as attendance at a training course or while on special duties. Other measures to help staff balance work and family life include a range of flexible working patterns.

Savers

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) of 3 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 349, by what date he expects his target of six million new savers to be achieved. [60084]

The Prime Minister: We have designed the Individual Savings Account and the Cost, Access and Terms standards to respond to the concerns of those who are not currently saving, or who are only saving very little. Half of this country's population have savings of less than £200. We are confident that ISAs will be attractive to significant numbers of new savers over the coming years.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the implementation of the recommendations contained in departmental Select Committee reports which have been accepted by Government departments. [59841]

The Prime Minister: Implementation of recommendations is a matter for individual departments and the relevant Select Committees. Departments set out in the Government response to a Select Committee report how they propose to implement the recommendations and, where appropriate, indicate a timetable. Select Committees then monitor progress as they see fit.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 365, what assessment he has made of the impact of the Working Time Directive on the rate of inflation in each of the next three years. [60201]

The Prime Minister: The Government do not believe that the Working Time Directive will have any significant impact on the rate of inflation over the next three years.

Charities (Ex-Service Men)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 361, if he will list the support given to *(a)* St. Dunstan's and *(b)* other such organisations. [60202]

The Prime Minister: We are very conscious of the tireless and highly professional way organisations such as St. Dunstan's assist their former colleagues and know how greatly their efforts are valued both by the present Service community and by ex-Servicemen and women.

There is, however, a considerable amount of Government assistance for those ex-service personnel who are disabled, including St. Dunstaners, including payment of tax-free War Pensions and enhanced occupational pensions through the Armed Forces Pensions Scheme (AFPS). Taken together, the AFPS and the War Pension Scheme provide a system of compensation for anyone disabled or widowed as a result of service in the Armed Forces. All War Pensioners are entitled to priority treatment through the National Health Service for treatment of their disability.

However, in keeping with the long standing practice of successive Governments, that public funds, raised through taxation, are not provided to assist charities' core activities, St. Dunstan's, in common with all registered charities, be they concerned with the Armed Forces or otherwise, is required to raise its own funding. The Charity Commissioners advise there are some 180,000 charities and it would be impossible for central Government to assist with fairness to any measurable degree. Again in common with all other charities, St. Dunstan's does receive support from the Government by way of certain tax reliefs.

Under Section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, there are powers to fund voluntary organisations whose activities support the Department of Health's policy objectives relating to health and personal and social services. However, the budget is finite and more applications are received than it is possible to meet. Earlier this year, an application from the Diana Gubbay Trust for the Blind, which is administered by St. Dunstan's, was reluctantly turned down as it was for more than the total amount of money available. A further application has been received by the Department of Health and will be given serious consideration.

Joint Statement (Liberal Democrats)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the constitutional and practical implications of the agreement between the Government and the Liberal Democrats; [60239]

(2) if Liberal Democrat Members who sit on Cabinet sub-committees are in receipt of classified material not available to all hon. Members belonging to the Government party; [60236]

(3) which members of the Liberal Democrat party will sit on Cabinet sub-committees as a result of his recent agreement with the leader of the Liberal Democrats; [60238]

(4) if the constitutional convention of collective Cabinet responsibility extends to Liberal Democrats serving on Cabinet sub-committees. [60240]

The Prime Minister: Members of the Liberal Democrat Party sit on only one Cabinet Committee: the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). It is a matter for the Liberal Democrats as to which of their members attend. These arrangements will not change as a result of my recent joint statement with the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Members of the Liberal Democrat Party who attend the Joint Consultative Committee are not bound by the constitutional convention of collective responsibility for decisions of the Government. However, they naturally receive the papers and minutes of the Committee, which, as is usual for Cabinet Committees, are classified documents.

No new constitutional implications arise as a result of my joint statement with the leader of the Liberal Democrats. Any practical implications will emerge from the review of the work of the JCC which is being undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost to the National Insurance Fund of the 2 per cent. inducement to purchase personal pension schemes; and how much of it was provided in respect of schemes which were mis-sold. [59759]

Mr. Denham: For tax years 1987–88 to 1992–93 inclusive, most people who contracted-out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) with an Appropriate Personal Pension (APP), qualified for an additional 2 per cent. incentive payment of minimum contributions. Up to the end of January 1998 (the last month for which figures are available) the total amount paid was £3,396.8 million.

Figures are not available for the amount paid to schemes that were mis-sold. People who were previously in their employer's contracted-out pension scheme for two years or more, and who were entitled to stay in that scheme but left voluntarily after 5 April 1988 while continuing to work for the same employer, would not have qualified for the incentive. The majority of people who were mis-sold an APP would have left their employer's scheme and would not therefore have qualified for the 2 per cent. incentive.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the cost to the National Insurance Fund for 1999–2000 and subsequent years, of the changes in *(a)* employers' and *(b)* employees' contributions announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Financial Statement on 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1097–111, and his pre-Budget statement on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 681–88. [59756]

Mr. Timms: The proposed changes to employees' National Insurance contributions from April 1999 are broadly revenue neutral for employers as a whole. The

changes to employees' contributions will reduce contribution revenue to the National Insurance Fund by £1.2 billion in 1999–2000 and by £1.4 billion a year in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost to the National Insurance Fund of the reduction in employers' contributions in April 1997 for the years 1997–98 and 1998–99. [59818]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

£ million

Year	*Reduction in employers' contributions*
1997–98	590
1998–99	640

Source:
Government Actuary's Department

National Insurance Recording Computer

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *603*, in how many cases new claimants for incapacity benefit have claims remaining to be processed, or have been referred to income support, as a result of the problems with the implementation of NIRS2; and when those claimants will be given correct payments of incapacity benefit. [59297]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* 95 per cent. of Incapacity Benefit claims received since 19 June 1998 have been processed normally by obtaining the contributions information from other sources. The remainder are either awaiting processing as normal or have been referred to Income Support. It is estimated that approximately 8,000 claimants have been referred to Income Support because the contributions information could not be obtained from other sources. These claimants will have their Incapacity Benefit claims reviewed as soon as the NIRS2 system is available.

It is planned that all new claims to Incapacity Benefit should be processed through NIRS2 from 18 November.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what contingency plans the Contributions Agency and Benefits Agency developed to accommodate the phased implementation of the introduction of NIRS2. [59285]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* Due to the scale, complexity and sensitivity of the NIRS2 system it has been thoroughly tested prior to acceptance by the Contributions Agency (CA). During the first year of operation the system is being introduced through a series of pilots leading to national implementation.

Contingency plans were developed by both the CA and the Benefits Agency (BA) in order to accommodate the phased implementation and the attendant difficulties. The CA appointed a Continuity Planning Manager in January 1998 with the aim of ensuring that CA, BA, Inland Revenue and other major stakeholders involved with NIRS2 developed robust and comprehensive contingency plans. These plans have been systematically updated to ensure minimum impact on contributors and benefit claimants.

The BA's contingency plans are based upon long-standing emergency procedures. As part of those procedures, managers and staff were provided with comprehensive guidance to enable them to deal with claims that could be affected by problems with the introduction of NIRS2. The guidance was issued at the beginning of the year and has been revised as required.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *603*, how much of the NIRS2 system remains to be switched on. [59286]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* On the 13 July 1998, the majority of the new system was switched on. With effect from 14 September 1998 further parts of the system were integrated with those already available.

The system is now being used to process Employers' End of Year National Insurance Returns. It is debiting the self-employed on a monthly basis and issuing National Insurance bills to the self-employed on a quarterly basis as well as making monthly payments to the pensions industry in relation to age-related rebates. NIRS2 has been processing all new and repeat claims for Jobseeker's Allowance since 9 November 1998, and it is planned that Incapacity Benefit will be processed from 18 November 1998.

There are still some functions within NIRS2 which are being piloted. These relate to the processing of Retirement Pensions, Widows Benefits and other functions to maintain individual National Insurance accounts. As soon as piloting is complete the functionality will be made available to system users.

Benefits (Entitlement Rules)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on those changes to benefit entitlement rules he currently proposes, indicating for each proposal the number of people who *(a)* will lose and *(b)* will be denied benefits as a result of proposed changes and their average financial loss. [56250]

Mr. Timms: The Government set out their proposals for taking forward the reform of the Welfare State in the document "A new contract for welfare: Principles into Practice" (Cm 4101). These proposals are based on the principles of work for those who can and security for those who cannot. Details of proposals which affect benefit entitlement are as follows:

Severe Disablement Allowance—we propose to reform Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) to provide more help to young people disabled at birth or early in life who do not have the opportunity to work and to build up entitlement to Incapacity Benefit. In the first year we estimate that there will be around 8,000 new claims from this group of people who will gain from the proposals. In the second year of the scheme almost 20,000 existing SDA recipients will be transferred on to the higher rate of Incapacity Benefit. These people will see increases of up to £25.60 a week at April 1998 rates.

We estimate that around 16,000 people per year aged 20 or over will no longer be able to claim SDA following the introduction of these changes. However, around 70 per cent. of those currently receiving SDA also receive Income Support (IS) and it is likely that the same proportion will continue to qualify for IS. This group will therefore see no change to their overall level of income. For those whose other income means they do not qualify for IS, the average loss will be in the region of £50 a week.

At the point of change, no one on SDA aged 20 or over will lose the benefit as a result of the changes.

Disability Income Guarantee—we propose to introduce a new Disability Income Guarantee for the poorest severely disabled people who have the highest care needs. We estimate that around 175,000 people under age 60 will benefit from the Guarantee in the first year. For adults, the Guarantee will mean an extra £5.75 a week for a single person and £8.30 for a couple, at April 1998 rates. Families will receive an extra £5.75 a week for each disabled child that qualifies.

Disability Living Allowance—we propose to extend the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to severely disabled children aged 3 and 4. We estimate that around 8,000 children will gain from this change during the first year by £35.85 a week at April 1998 rates.

Incapacity Benefit—we propose to modernise the Incapacity Benefit rules to strengthen the link between work and entitlement and to introduce a fairer partnership between State and private provision. These measures will apply only to new claims for benefit. At the point of change, no one already on Incapacity Benefit will lose benefit as a result of these changes.

In the first year following the introduction of the changes, we estimate that around 30,000 claimants will not qualify for Incapacity Benefit as a result of the change to the contribution conditions. Approximately 70 per cent. of them will already be on income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support when their claim to Incapacity Benefit is made, and their entitlement to these benefits would continue. Over the same period, we estimate that a further 35,000 claimants will have their Incapacity Benefit reduced as a result of taking some account of their occupational and personal pensions.

The average net loss will be around £27 a week at April 1998 rates.

The single gateway—from April 2000, in the pilot areas, new benefit claimants of working age who are out of work will be required to participate in an interview with a personal adviser as a condition of receiving benefit. This will affect approximately 400,000 new claimants per year over the 12 pilot areas.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60125]

Mr. Timms: The major systems key to the payments of benefits and pensions are designed to hold dates in a format unaffected by the turn of the century. The first part of our contingency is that testing has been built in to allow for a full year's running before 31 December 1999 except for the National Insurance Recording system which is not expected to be confirmed compliant until 31 October 1999, or earlier if possible. Additional testing including business assurance testing will continue to provide further confidence.

The Department expects to complete the programme of work to upgrade or replace business critical desktop computer systems by the end of March 1999. This target allows adequate contingency before the dates these systems might otherwise fail.

We have a range of plans to support the continuity of Social Security operations and are working closely with other Departments, public bodies and Action 2000 to identify and if necessary deal with specific Year 2000 related threats. Our target for having rehearsed Millennium-related business continuity plans is the end of March 1999. However, even beyond this date we will continue to assess the potential impact of residual risks arising from external factors over which we have no direct control, for example, electricity supply. We will continue to update plans and if necessary take action as more and better intelligence becomes available.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement; [60122]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [60124]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government Departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of Departments' plans which have been published in the Library of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library of the House and on the Internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60123]

Mr. Timms: This Department's Year 2000 activity is being progressed on the basis of business critical first. There have been no problems to date arising from Millennium compliance which have affected the Department's operations.

A problem which this Department has encountered in dealing with the Millennium date change concerns reliance on third parties. We have identified those suppliers which pose the greatest risk and where impact of external failure on the business would be greatest. We have successfully identified and contacted 99 per cent. of these business critical suppliers. In common with other organisations, it is proving difficult to obtain from some of our suppliers a precise account of the progress of their Year 2000 compliance work. We are validating risk assessments and ensuring relevant business continuity plans incorporate the necessary contingencies.

We anticipate that initiatives led by Action 2000, such as Pledge 2000 and the National Infrastructure Forum, to which this Department is contributing, will improve the quality of compliance information available.

SERPS

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of the number of pensioners contracted out of state earnings related pension scheme who are being underpaid sums of *(a)* £0.01 to £4.99, *(b)* £5 to £9.99, *(c)* £10 to £19.99, *(d)* £20 to £29.99, *(e)* £30 to £39.99. *(f)* £40 to £49.99, *(g)* £50 to £59.99, *(h)* £60 to £69.99, *(i)* £70 to £79.99, *(j)* £80 to £80.99 and *(k)* £90 to £100 per week. [59259]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* It is estimated that there are 7,000 cases of people contracted-out of SERPS where the calculation of the amount of SERPS payable has been prevented.

These are cases where a claimant paid into a personal pension or occupational pension schemes and there are unresolved issues relating to the membership of that scheme. The theoretical underpayment can range from £0.01 to £100 a week. Procedures are in place which allow Benefits Agency offices to obtain a clerical calculation in cases of financial hardship or where the claimant is not prepared to wait. An estimated 1,500 clerical calculations have been carried out enabling the correct payments to be made to these claimants. Approximately 5,500 claims are potentially underpaid. As soon as the system is operating satisfactorily any underpayments will be made.

A detailed breakdown of the amounts of underpayments is not yet available. A more accurate assessment will be available in due course. Considerable effort is being made to ensure that full normal operations can resume as soon as possible.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the real annual growth in the Social Security budget from *(a)* 1993–94 to 1998–99 and from *(b)* 1998–99 to 2001–02, after adjusting for the transfer from family credit to the working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [59431]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* Following real growth in the Department's benefit expenditure of 10.1 per cent. between 1991–92 and 1992–93 and 6.7 per cent. between 1992–93 and 1993–94, average annual real growth in the Department's benefit expenditure is estimated to be 0.6 per cent. from 1993–94 to 1998–99 and 1.5 per cent. from 1998–99 to 2001–02. Benefit expenditure grew by 4 per cent. over the last Parliament. It is estimated that it will grow by less than 2 per cent. in this Parliament.

Private Pensions

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the review of private pension provision will be completed. [59322]

Mr. Denham: The Government's Pension Review is looking at all aspects of pensions, including second tier pensions. As set out in the Green Paper "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare" (Cm 3805), we intend to publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year.

Child Maintenance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *606–07*, (1) what is the average loss in child maintenance to parents under the formula proposed in the Green Paper on child support, broken down into

those now receiving *(a)* under £5, *(b)* £5-£9.99, *(c)* £10-£19.99, *(d)* £20-£29.99, *(e)* £30-£39.99, *(f)* £40-£49.99, *(g)* £50-£59.99, *(h)* £60-£69.99, *(i)* £70-£79.99, *(j)* £80-£89.99, *(k)* £90-£99.99 and *(l)* £100 and above per week; [59382]

(2) what the basis is of his estimate that compliance with child maintenance orders will rise to 80 per cent. or more under the new scheme. [59648]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Current banded assessment (£)	*Average change in maintenance assessment*
Under 5.00	*
5.00–9.99	2.50
10.00–19.99	4.50
20.00–29.99	7.00
30.00–39.99	11.00
40.00–49.99	14.50
50.00–59.99	19.00
60.00–69.99	21.00
70.00–79.99	24.50
80.00–89.99	24.50
90.00–99.99	24.50
100 and over	22.00
All cases	16.50

Notes:

1. Average changes in maintenance assessments calculated from February 1997 5 per cent. scan of the child support computer and based on estimated 1997–98 caseloads and do not take account of, for example, the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit.
2. Average changes have been rounded to the nearest 50p. '*' denotes a change of less than 50p a week.
3. Caseloads include parents with a full maintenance assessment in place and for whom the non-resident parent has a positive assessable income.
4. Reflects benefit status of the parent with care at date of first assessment.

This table does not include parents with care on Income Support whose maintenance assessment is reduced; these cases will experience an overall increase in income because of the proposed introduction of a £10 maintenance premium. Also the information above defines cases as losers based on assessed maintenance, rather than maintenance paid, and before allowing for any changes in compliance which may occur as a result of the new formula.

Our estimates of increased compliance are based on the simpler, transparent rules of the new scheme. Non-resident parents will be able to see at a glance how much their assessment should be. Information on which the basic assessment is calculated will be more straightforward and there will be little opportunity for those who simply do not wish to pay to thwart the Agency's efforts in securing maintenance for the children. Assessments will be made faster and all the evidence is that non-resident parents are more willing to pay, and pay regularly, if they are contacted quickly.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals claimed invalidity benefit or its equivalent as a year on year figure from 1995 to 1998 in *(a)* each London borough, *(b)* each London parliamentary constituency and *(c)* nationally. [59356]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Number of new claims to incapacity benefit in Great Britain

Period	Number
13 April 1995–31 March 1996	1,054,340
1 April 1996–31 March 1997	1,062,817
1 April 1997–31 March 1998	1,012,981

Number of incapacity benefit recipients

Area	1996	31 May 1997	1998
Great Britain	1,794,460	1,732,740	1,644,600
All London Boroughs	141,550	138,796	129,796
City of London	101	61	124
Barking and Dagenham	4,438	4,716	4,658
Barnet	4,579	4,312	3,906
Bexley	4,277	4,109	4,088
Brent	4,478	4,513	4,000
Bromley	4,922	4,677	4,648
Camden	3,974	4,048	4,092
Croydon	5,426	5,466	4,882
Ealing	6,959	6,479	6,291
Enfield	5,709	5,488	4,868
Greenwich	5,204	5,122	5,180
Hackney	4,135	4,151	3,800
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,853	3,564	3,426
Haringey	4,418	4,495	4,285
Harrow	3,268	3,138	2,925
Havering	5,426	5,082	4,962
Hillingdon	4,357	4,595	4,279
Hounslow	4,902	4,715	4,356
Islington	4,297	4,555	4,024
Kensington and Chelsea	2,158	2,207	2,139
Kingston upon Thames	1,755	1,842	2,106
Lambeth	5,971	5,607	5,284
Lewisham	5,346	5,223	4,944
Merton	3,147	3,117	2,714

Number of incapacity benefit recipients

Area	1996	31 May 1997	1998
Newham	6,677	6,660	6,047
Redbridge	4,720	4,657	4,430
Richmond upon Thames	1,997	2,024	1,570
Southwark	6,052	5,891	4,943
Sutton	2,421	2,489	2,202
Tower Hamlets	3,714	3,199	3,582
Waltham Forest	5,104	5,041	4,589
Wandsworth	4,962	4,879	4,063
Westminster	2,804	2,510	2,390

Notes:
1. The source of the number of new Incapacity Benefit claims is the Benefits Agency Central Data Unit. These figures are subject to change.
2. The source of the number of Incapacity Benefit recipients is a 5 per cent. sample of the INCAP computer system. Excludes a small number of cases not on the system.
3. An individual may make more than one claim to Incapacity Benefit during a year.
4. Incapacity Benefit replaced Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit on 13 April 1995.

Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the additional cost of the guaranteed minimum income for pensioners if 100 per cent. take-up were achieved. [59819]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table.

Estimates of the additional cost of 100 per cent. take-up of the guaranteed minimum income for pensioners, above the cost for take up included in the comprehensive spending review (CSR) package

£ million

Estimated expenditure across Income Support/Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Benefit

Year	Mid-range estimate
1999–2000	750
2001–2001	550
2001–2002	350

Notes:
1. 100 per cent. take-up could be achieved only if all eligible pensioners took up their entitlement from the very first day they became entitled. There will always be some pensioners who choose not to claim because they are entitled only to small amounts.
2. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest £50 million, and are based on the 1995–96 and 1996–97 Family Resources Survey, and forecasts of pensioner benefit units consistent with estimates produced for the Comprehensive Spending Review.
3. Estimates decrease over the three-year CSR period, reflecting the build up to 85 per cent. take-up by expenditure assumed in the CSR costings. Estimates are normally given in ranges, but for consistency with the CSR published figures, the mid-point estimate is quoted in the reply.
4. As all estimates based on household survey data are subject to a degree of uncertainty, these estimates should be treated as indicative of broad magnitudes only.

National Insurance Contributions

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list changes in employee contribution National Insurance rates from 1979 to the present day. [59526]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

Employee National Insurance Contributions rates

Financial Year	Earnings per week	Contribution rate percentage
1979–80	Under £19.50	—
	£19.50-£135	6.5
	Over £135	—
1980–81	Under £23	—
	£23-£165	6.75
	Over £165	—
1981–82	Under £27	—
	£27-£200	7.75
	Over £200	—
1982–83	Under £29.50	—
	£29.50-£220	8.75
	Over £220	—
1983–84	Under £32.50	—
	£32.50-£235	9
	Over £235	—
1984–85	Under £34	—
	£34-£250	9
	Over £250	—
1985–86	Under £35.50	—
	£35.50-£265	9
	Over £265	—
5 October 1985	Under £35.50	—
	£35.50-£54.99	5
	£55-£89.99	7
	£90-£265	9
	Over £265	—
1986–87	Under £38	—
	£38-£59.99	5
	£60-£94.99	7
	£95-£285	9
	Over £285	—
1987–88	Under £39	—
	£39-£64.99	5
	£65-£99.99	7
	£100-£295	9
	Over £295	—
1988–89	Under £41	—
	£41-£69.99	5
	£70-£104.99	7
	£105-£305	9
	Over £305	—
1989–90	Under £43	—
	£43-£74.99	5
	£75-£114.99	7
	£115-£325	9
	Over £325	—
5 October 1989	Under £43	—
	£43-£325	2% on first £43 + 9% on balance
	Over £325	—
1990–91	Under £46	—
	£46-£350	2% on first £46 + 9% on balance
	Over £350	—
1991–92	Under £52	—
	£52-£390	2% on first £52 + 9% on balance
	Over £390	—
1992–93	Under £54	—
	£54-£405	2% on first £54 + 9% on balance
	Over £405	—
1993–94	Under £56	—
	£56-£420	2% on first £56 + 9% on balance
	Over £420	—
1994–95	Under £57	—
	£57-£430	2% on first £57 + 10% on balance
	Over £430	—
1995–96	Under £58	—
	£58-£440	2% on first £58 + 10% on balance
	Over £440	—
1996–97	Under £61	—
	£61-£455	2% on first £61 + 10% on balance
	Over £455	—
1997–98	Under £62	—
	£62-£465	2% on first £62 + 10% on balance
	Over £465	—
1998–99	Under £64	—
	£64-£485	2% on first £64 +10% on balance
	Over £485	—

Notes:

1. Figures shown are standard non-contracted-out rates
2. The National Insurance Contribution rates have been extracted from Social Security Statistics 1994 and 1998
3. Reduced banded rates were introduced from October 1985
4. The rates structure was further revised in October 1989

Photosensitivity

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the mobility allowance regulations to ensure that people who cannot walk in daylight because of disability arising from photosensitivity are included within the scope of the allowance. [59711]

Mr. Timms: Regulations provide entitlement to the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance mobility component where a person's

"ability to walk out of doors is so limited, as regards the distance over which or the speed at which or at the length of time for which or the manner in which he can make progress on foot without severe discomfort, that he is virtually unable to walk".

It is accepted that a severe reaction to sunlight may cause severe discomfort, however, the discomfort is not related to the act of walking. This was also the view of the Court of Appeal and we will not therefore be reviewing the regulations.

Long-term Care

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will eliminate the difference in entitlement to social security benefits between those resident in local authority residential houses and those in private residential homes. [59712]

Angela Eagle: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on 10 November 1998, *Official Report,* columns *163–64*.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people, awaiting an appeal hearing on refusal of applications for, or withdrawal of, the mobility element of disability living allowance, have been waiting

(a) between six and 12 months and *(b)* over 12 months, for their appeals to be heard; and if he will make a statement. [59615]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested. However, at the end of August 1998, the number of people awaiting an appeal hearing on refusal of applications for, or withdrawal of, the mobility element of Disability Living Allowance totalled 277. Of these, 121 had been waiting less than six months, 88 between six and 12 months and 68 over 12 months.

Source:

Appeals—Data supplied by Analytical Services Division (ASD) from the Independent Tribunal Service Generic Appeals Processing System.

Child Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current child dependency increases for widowed mothers allowance; and what additional uprating would have been needed to restore the combined value of child benefit and child dependency increases in April to their November 1979 level relative to *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings. [59814]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

£

	First child	*Subsequent child(ren)*
November 1979		
Child Dependency increase	7.10	7.10
Child Benefit	4.00	4.00
Total	11.10	11.10
April 1998		
Child Dependency increase	9.90	11.30
Child Benefit	11.45	9.30
Total	21.35	20.60
If increased by earnings to April 1998		
Child Dependency increase	26.70	26.70
Child Benefit	14.95	14.95
Total	41.65	41.65
If increased by prices to April 1998		
Child Dependency increase	19.30	19.30
Child Benefit	10.60	10.60
Total	29.90	29.90

Notes:

1. The Retail Prices Index (all items) was used to put Child Benefit and Widowed Mother's Allowance child dependency addition into real terms as at April 1998
2. The average earnings of full time adult employees was calculated using the New Earnings Survey and Average Earnings Index (AEI), both produced by the Office for National Statistics

Benefit Uprating

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish details of the April 1999 benefit uprating. [59816]

Mr. Darling: The information requested was placed in the Library, and the Vote Office and copies of the schedule were sent to all right hon. and hon. Members of the House in October. These details are now reproduced.

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999

£

	Old rates 1998	*New rates 1999*
Attendance Allowance:		
higher rate	51.30	52.95
lower rate	34.30	35.40
Child Benefit:		
only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (couple)	11.45	14.40
only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (lone parent)	17.10	17.10
each subsequent child	9.30	9.60
Child's Special Allowance:		
see note on Child Dependency Increase[1]	11.30	11.35
Council Tax Benefit:		
Personal allowances		
single		
18 to 24	39.85	40.70
25 or over	50.35	51.40
lone parent—18 or over	50.35	51.40
couple—one or both over 18	79.00	80.65
Dependent Children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	17.30	20.20
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	25.35	25.90
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.30	30.95
Premiums		
family	11.05	13.90
family (lone parent rate)	22.05	22.05
pensioner		
single	20.10	23.60
couple	30.35	35.95
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	22.35	25.90
couple	33.55	39.20
pensioner (higher)		
single	27.20	30.85
couple	38.90	44.65
disability		
single	21.45	21.90
couple	30.60	31.25
severe disability		
single	38.50	39.75
couple (one qualifies)	38.50	39.75
couple (both qualify)	77.00	79.50
disabled child	21.45	21.90
carer	13.65	13.95
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	16.20	16.70
lower rate	12.95	13.35
Non-dependant deductions		
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: £255 or more	6.00	6.50
gross income: £204 - £254.99	5.00	5.40
gross income: £118 - £203.99	4.00	4.30
gross income less than £118	2.00	2.15
others, aged 18 or over	2.00	2.15

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	*New rates 1999*
Alternative maximum Council Tax Benefit second adult on Income Support or income based Jobseekers Allowance	25% of Council Tax	
second adult's gross income: under £118	15% of Council Tax	
£118 to £154.99	7.5% of Council Tax	
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for perm. res. of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded for perm. res. of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
childcare charges (2 or more children)	100.00	100.00
other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus		
50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in DWA	10.80	11.05
30 Hr Adult Credit in FC	10.80	11.05
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Dependency Increases:		
Adult Dependency Increases		
For spouse or person looking after children, with; retirement pension on own insurance, long term incapacity benefit, unemployability supplement	38.70	39.95
severe disablement allowance	23.20	23.95
invalid care allowance	23.15	23.90
short-term incapacity benefit if beneficiary over pension age	37.20	38.40
maternity allowance/short-term incapacity benefit	30.20	31.15
Child dependency increases, with; retirement pension, widows benefit, short-term incapacity benefit at the higher rate & long term incapacity benefit invalid care allowance severe disab. allowance, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement and short-term incapacity benefit if beneficiary over pension age'	11.30	11.35

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	*New rates 1999*
Disability Living Allowance:		
Care Component		
Highest	51.30	52.95
Middle	34.30	35.40
Lowest	13.60	14.05
Mobility Component		
Higher	35.85	37.00
Lower	13.60	14.05
Disability Working Allowance:		
Adult allowance		
Single people	50.75	51.80
Couples/Lone Parents	79.40	81.05
30 Hours Allowance	10.80	11.05
Child allowance		
from birth	12.35	15.15
from September following 11th birthday	20.45	20.90
from September following 16th birthday	25.40	25.95
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)		
Single people	59.25	60.50
Couples/Lone Parents	79.00	80.65
Disabled Child's Allowance	21.45	21.90
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus		
50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
childcare charges (2 or more children)	100.00	100.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Earnings Rules		
Invalid Care Allowance	50.00	50.00
Limit of earnings from councillor's allowance	48.00	49.50
Therapeutic earnings limit	48.00	58.00
Industrial injuries unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,496.00	3,016.00
War pensioners' unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,496.00	3,016.00
Adult dependency increases with short-term incap.benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	30.20	31.15
(b) over pension age	37.20	38.40
maternity allowance	30.20	31.15

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	New rates 1999
retirement pension, long-term incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance, unemployability supplement where dependant		
(a) is living with claimant	50.35	51.40
(b) still qualifies for the tapered earnings rule	45.09	45.09
retirement pension, long-term incap benefit and unemployability supplement where dependant not living with claimant	38.70	39.95
severe disablement allowance where dependant not living with claimant	23.20	23.95
invalid care allowance	23.15	23.90
Child dependency increases level at which CDIs are affected by earnings of claimant's spouse or partner		
for first child	140.00	145.00
for each subsequent child	18.00	19.00
Family Credit		
Adult credit	48.80	49.80
30 hours credit	10.80	11.05
Child credits		
from birth[2]	12.35	15.15
from September following 11th birthday	20.45	20.90
from September following 16th birthday	25.40	25.95
Applicable amount (ie threshold)	79.00	80.65
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Assumed income from capital £1 for every £250 or part of £250 between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
childcare charges (2 or more children)	100.00	100.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Guardian's Allowance see note on Child Dependency Increase	11.30	11.35
Hospital Downrating		
20% rate	12.95	13.35
40% rate	25.90	26.70
Housing Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
16 to 24	39.85	40.70
25 or over	50.35	51.40
lone parent		
under 18	39.85	40.70
18 or over	50.35	51.40
couple		
both under 18	60.10	61.35
one or both over 18	79.00	80.65
dependent children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	17.30	20.20
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	25.35	25.90
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.30	30.95
Premiums		
family	11.05	13.90
family (lone parent rate)	22.05	22.05
pensioner		
single	20.10	23.60
couple	30.35	35.95
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	22.35	25.90
couple	33.55	39.20
pensioner (higher)		
single	27.20	30.85
couple	38.90	44.65
disability		
single	21.45	21.90
couple	30.60	31.25
severe disability		
single	38.50	39.75
couple (one qualifies)	38.50	39.75
couple (both qualify)	77.00	79.50
disabled child	21.45	21.90
carer	13.65	13.95
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	16.20	16.70
lower rate	12.95	13.35
Non-dependant deductions		
rent rebates and allowances aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or		
gross income less than £80.00	7.00	7.20
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: less than £80.00	7.00	7.20
gross income: £80 to £117.99	16.00	16.50
gross income: £118 to £154.99	22.00	22.65
gross income: £155 to £203.99	36.00	37.10
gross income: £204.00 to £254.99	41.00	42.25
gross income: £255.00 and above	45.00	46.35
Service charges for fuel		
heating	9.25	9.25
hot water	1.15	1.15
lighting	0.80	0.80
cooking	1.15	1.15
Amount ineligible for meals		
three or more meals a day		
single claimant	17.95	18.35
each person in family aged 16 or over	17.95	18.35
each child under 16	9.05	9.25
less than three meals a day		
single claimant	11.95	12.20
each person in family aged 16 or over	11.95	12.20
each child under 16	6.00	6.15
breakfast only—claimant and each member of family	2.15	2.20

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	*New rates 1999*
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for perm. res. of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amt disregarded for perm. res. of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
childcare charges (2 or more children)	100.00	100.00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus		
50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in DWA	10.80	11.05
30 Hr Adult Credit in FC	10.80	11.05
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Incapacity Benefit		
Long-term Incapacity Benefit	64.70	66.75
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (under pension age)		
lower rate	48.80	50.35
higher rate	57.70	59.55
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (over pension age)		
lower rate	62.05	64.05
higher rate	64.70	66.75
Increase of Long-term Incapacity Benefit for age		
higher rate	13.60	14.05
lower rate	6.80	7.05
Invalidity Allowance (Transitional)		
higher rate	13.60	14.05
middle rate	8.60	8.90
lower rate	4.30	4.45
Income Support		
Personal Allowances		
single		
under 18—usual rate	30.30	30.95
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	39.85	40.70
18 to 24	39.85	40.70
25 or over	50.35	51.40
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	30.30	30.95
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	39.85	40.70
18 or over	50.35	51.40
couple		
both under 18	60.10	61.35
one or both 18 or over	79.00	80.65
dependent children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	17.30	20.20
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	25.35	25.90
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.30	30.95
Residential Allowance		
except Greater London	57.50	59.40
Greater London	64.00	66.10
Premiums		
family	11.05	13.90
family (lone parent rate)	15.75	15.75
pensioner		
single	20.10	23.60
couple	30.35	35.95
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	22.35	25.90
couple	33.55	39.20
pensioner (higher)		
single	27.20	30.85
couple	38.90	44.65
disability		
single	21.45	21.90
couple	30.60	31.25
severe disability		
single	38.50	39.75
couple (one qualifies)	38.50	39.75
couple (both qualify)	77.00	79.50
disabled child	21.45	21.90
carer	13.65	13.95
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in residential care homes		
old age	213.00	218.00
very dependent elderly	247.00	252.00
mental disorder (not handicap)	225.00	230.00
drug/alcohol dependence	225.00	230.00
mental handicap	257.00	262.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	292.00	298.00
(b) (over pension age)	213.00	218.00
others	213.00	218.00
maximum Greater London increase	44.00	45.00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	319.00	326.00
drug/alcohol dependence	319.00	326.00
mental handicap	325.00	332.00
terminal illness	318.00	325.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	359.00	367.00
(b) (over pension age)	318.00	325.00
others (including elderly)	318.00	325.00
maximum Greater London increase	49.00	50.00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation (Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1.10	1.10
midday meal	1.55	1.55
evening meal	1.55	1.55

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	New rates 1999
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in		
private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes		
personal expenses	14.45	14.75
dependent children		
(a) under 11	5.95	6.05
(b) 11 to 15	8.65	8.85
(c) 16 to 17	10.05	10.25
(d) age 18	14.45	14.75
hospital		
higher rate	16.20	16.70
lower rate	12.95	13.35
local authority (Pt III) accommodation	64.70	66.75
of which, Personal Expenses	14.45	14.75
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in:		
the Polish home Ilford Park		
max amount for accommodation and meals	359.00	367.00
personal expenses for claimant	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for partner	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for dep children		
(a) under 11	5.95	6.05
(b) 11 to 15	8.65	8.85
(c) 16 to 17	10.05	10.25
(d) 18	15.55	15.55
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependants		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance		
aged 18 or over, not in work or gross income less than £80.00	7.00	7.20
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
gross income: £80 to £117.99	16.00	16.50
gross income: £118 to £154.99	22.00	22.65
gross income: £155 to £203.99	36.00	37.10
gross income: £204.00 to £254.99	41.00	42.25
gross income: £255.00 and above	45.00	46.35
Deduction for direct payments		
arrears of housing, fuel and water costs		
council tax and fines default	2.55	2.60
deductions for child maintenance		
(standard)	5.10	5.20
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.55	2.60
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2.55	2.60
court order against couple	3.95	4.05
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	7.65	7.80
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.00	10.40
Reduction in benefit for strikers	27.00	27.50
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for perm. res. of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amt disregarded for perm. res. of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	New rates 1999
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couple's earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Industrial Death Benefit		
Widow's pension		
higher rate	64.70	66.75
lower rate	19.41	20.03
Industrial Disablement Pension		
18 and over, or under 18 with dependants		
100%	104.70	108.10
90%	94.23	97.29
80%	83.76	86.48
70%	73.29	75.67
60%	62.82	64.86
50%	52.35	54.05
40%	41.88	43.24
30%	31.41	32.43
20%	20.94	21.62
Under 18		
100%	64.15	66.20
90%	57.74	59.58
80%	51.32	52.96
70%	44.91	46.34
60%	38.49	39.72
50%	32.08	33.10
40%	25.66	26.48
30%	19.25	19.86
20%	12.83	13.24
Maximum life gratuity (lump sum)	6,960.00	7,180.00
Unemployability Supplement	64.70	66.75
plus where appropriate an increase for early incapacity		
higher rate	13.60	14.05
middle rate	8.60	8.90
lower rate	4.30	4.45
Maximum reduced earnings allowance	41.88	43.24
Maximum retirement allowance	10.47	10.81
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	84.00	86.60
intermediate rate	63.00	64.95
normal maximum rate	42.00	43.30
part-time rate	21.00	21.65
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	42.00	43.30
Invalid Care Allowance	38.70	39.95
Jobseekers Allowance		
Contribution based JSA—pers. rates		
under 18	30.30	30.95
18 to 24	39.85	40.70
25 or over	50.35	51.40

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	New rates 1999
Income-based JSA—pers. allowances		
under 18	30.30	30.95
18 to 24	39.85	40.70
25 or over	50.35	51.40
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	30.30	30.95
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	39.85	40.70
18 or over	50.35	51.40
couple		
both under 18	30.30	30.95
both under 18, one disabled	39.85	40.70
both under 18, with resp. for a child	60.10	61.35
one under 18, one 18–24	39.85	40.70
one under 18, one 25+	50.35	51.40
both 18 or over	79.00	80.65
dependent children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	17.30	20.20
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	25.35	25.90
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.30	30.95
Residential Allowance		
except Greater London	57.50	59.40
Greater London	64.00	66.10
Premiums		
family	11.05	13.90
family (lone parent rate)	15.75	15.75
pensioner		
single	20.10	23.60
couple	30.35	35.95
pensioner (enhanced)		
couple	33.55	39.20
pensioner (higher)		
single	27.20	30.85
couple	38.90	44.65
disability		
single	21.45	21.90
couple	30.60	31.25
severe disability		
single	38.50	39.75
couple (one qualifies)	38.50	39.75
couple (both qualify)	77.00	79.50
disabled child	21.45	21.90
carer	13.65	13.95
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in residential care homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	225.00	230.00
drug/alcohol dependence	225.00	230.00
mental handicap	257.00	262.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	292.00	298.00
(b) others	213.00	218.00
maximum Greater London increase	44.00	45.00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	319.00	326.00
drug/alcohol dependence	319.00	326.00
mental handicap	325.00	332.00
terminal illness	318.00	325.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	359.00	367.00
(b) others (including elderly)	318.00	325.00
maximum Greater London increase	49.00	50.00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation (Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1.10	1.10
midday meal	1.55	1.55
evening meal	1.55	1.55
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes		
personal expenses	14.45	14.75
dependent children		
(a) under 11	5.95	6.05
(b) 11 to 15	8.65	8.85
(c) 16 to 17	10.05	10.25
(d) age 18	14.45	14.75
hospital		
higher rate	16.20	16.70
lower rate	12.95	13.35
local authority (Pt III) accommodation	64.70	66.75
of which, Personal Expenses	14.45	14.75
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependants		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance		
aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or gross income less than £80.00	7.00	7.20
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: less than £80.00	7.00	7.20
gross income: £80 to £117.99	16.00	16.50
gross income: £118 to £154.99	22.00	22.65
gross income: £155 to £203.99	36.00	37.10
gross income: £204.00 to £254.99	41.00	42.25
gross income: £255.00 and above	45.00	46.35
Deduction for direct payments		
Deductions from JSA (IB)		
arrears of housing, fuel and water costs council tax and fines default, and	2.55	2.60
Deductions for Child Maintenance		
deductions for child maintenance (standard)	5.10	5.20
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.55	2.60
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2.55	2.60
court order against couple	3.95	4.05
Deductions from JSA (Cont.)		
Arrears of Comm. Charge, Council Tax & fines		
Age 16–17	10.10	10.31
Age 18–24	13.28	13.56
Age 25+	16.78	17.13
Maximum deduction for arrears of Child Supp. Maintenance		
Age 16–17	10.10	10.31
Age 18–24	13.28	13.56
Age 25+	16.78	17.13
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	7.65	7.80
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.00	10.40
Reduction in benefit for strikers	27.00	27.50

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	*New rates 1999*
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for perm. res. of RC/NH	16,000.0 0	16,000.00
amt disregarded for perm. res. of RC/NH	10,000.0 0	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couple's earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Maternity Allowance		
Lower rate	50.10	51.70
Higher rate	57.70	59.55
Pneumoconiosis, Byssinosis, Workmen's Compensation (Supplementation) and other schemes		
Total disablement allowance and major incapacity allowance (maximum)	104.70	108.10
Partial disablement allowance	38.70	39.95
Unemployability supplement plus where appropriate increases for early incapacity	64.70	66.75
higher rate	13.60	14.05
middle rate	8.60	8.90
lower rate	4.30	4.45
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	84.00	86.60
intermediate rate	63.00	64.95
normal maximum rate	42.00	43.30
part-time rate	21.00	21.65
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	42.00	43.30
Lesser incapacity allowance		
maximum rate of allowance	38.70	39.95
based on loss of earnings over	51.30	52.95
Retirement Pension		
Category A or B	64.70	66.75
Category B (lower)—husband's insurance	38.70	39.95
Category C or D—non-contributory	38.70	39.95
Category C (lower)—non-contributory	23.15	23.90
Additional pension		Increase by: 3.20%
Increments to:-		
Basic & additional pensions		Increase by:
Contracted out deductions (CODs) (Pre April 1988 earnings)		3.20%
Graduated Retirement Benefit (GRB)		

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	*New rates 1999*
Increments to CODs (April 1988-April 1996 earnings)		Additional increase
(3.0% paid by schemes)		0.2% to that paid by schemes
Graduated Retirement Benefit (unit)(pence)	8.40	8.67
Graduated Retirement Benefit (Inherited)		Increase by: 3.20%
Addition at age 80	0.25	0.25
Severe Disablement Allowance		
Basic rate	39.10	40.35
Age-related addition (from December 1990)		
Higher rate	13.60	14.05
Middle rate	8.60	8.90
Lower rate	4.30	4.45
Statutory Maternity Pay		
Earnings threshold	64.00	66.00
Lower rate	57.70	59.55
Statutory Sick Pay		
Earnings threshold	64.00	66.00
Standard rate	57.70	59.55
War Pensions		
Disablement Pension (100% rates)		
officer (£ per annum)	5,797.00	5,985.00
other ranks	111.10	114.70
Age allowances		
40–50%	7.40	7.65
over 50% but not over 70%	11.45	11.80
over 70% but not over 90%	16.30	16.80
over 90%	22.90	23.60
Disablement gratuity		
specified minor injury (minimum)	707.00	730.00
specified minor injury (maximum)	5,284.00	5,453.00
unspecified minor injury (minimum)	294.00	303.00
unspecified minor injury (maximum)	6,871.00	7,091.00
Unemployability allowance		
personal	68.65	70.85
adult dependency increase	38.70	39.95
increase for first child	9.90	9.90
increase for subsequent children	11.30	11.35
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	13.60	14.05
middle rate	8.60	8.90
lower rate	4.30	4.45
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	84.00	86.60
intermediate rate	63.00	64.95
normal maximum rate	42.00	43.30
part-time rate	21.00	21.65
Comforts allowance		
higher rate	18.00	18.60
lower rate	9.00	9.30
Mobility supplement	39.95	41.25
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	41.88	43.24
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	42.00	43.30
Severe disablement occupational allowance	21.00	21.65

Schedule of main proposed social security benefit rates—April 1999 £

	Old rates 1998	New rates 1999
Clothing allowance (£ per annum, maximum)	142.00	147.00
Education allowance (£ per annum, maximum)	120.00	120.00
War widow's pension		
Widow (private)	83.90	86.60
Widow (NCO)	84.20	86.90
Widow—Officer (£ per annum, maximum)	5,190.00	5,356.00
Childless widow u-40 (private)	19.41	20.03
Childless widow (NCO)	19.70	20.33
Childless widow (Officer maximum £ per annum)	5,190.00	5,356.00
Supplementary Pension	54.70	56.45
age allowance		
(a) age 65 to 69	9.60	9.90
(b) age 70 to 79	18.40	19.00
(c) age 80 and over	27.40	28.30
children's allowance		
increase for first child (adjusted for ChB increase)	14.25	14.35
increase for subsequent children	15.65	15.80
Orphan's pension		
increase for first child (adjusted for ChB increase)	16.05	16.20
increase for subsequent children	17.45	17.65
Unmarried dependant living as spouse (max)	81.85	84.55
Rent allowance (maximum)	31.75	32.75
Adult orphan's pension (maximum)	64.70	66.75
Widower's pension		
private (maximum)	83.90	86.60
officer (£ per annum, maximum)	5,190.00	5,356.00
Widow's Benefit		
Widow's payment (lump sum)	1,000.00	1,000.00
Widowed mother's allowance	64.70	66.75
Widow's pension		
standard rate	64.70	66.75
age-related[3]		
age 54 (49)	60.17	62.08
53 (48)	55.64	57.41
52 (47)	51.11	52.73
51 (46)	46.58	48.06
50 (45)	42.06	43.39
49 (44)	37.53	38.72
48 (43)	33.00	34.04
47 (42)	28.47	29.37
46 (41)	23.94	24.70
45 (40)	19.41	20.03

[1] The Overlapping Benefits Regulations provide for the rate of child dependency increases, guardian's allowance and child special allowance to be adjusted where the increase or allowance is payable for the eldest eligible child for whom ChB is also payable. The weekly rate of the increase or allowance is reduced by the differential (less the 75p derived from the Oct 1991 increase in Chb and the £2.60 above normal uprating) between the rate of ChB payable for the oldest eligible child and that payable for a subsequent child.

[2] Includes £2.50 increase from 9 November 1998.

[3] For deaths occurring before 11 April 1988 refer to age-points shown in brackets.

Earnings top-up (ETU) rates £

	Old rates 1998	New rates 1999
Scheme A		
Credit		
couple	48.80	49.85
single 25 and over	29.45	30.00
Single under 25	23.90	24.40
for working 30 hours+ pw	10.80	11.05
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)		
couple	79.00	80.65
single 25 and over	61.15	62.45
single under 25	50.65	51.70
Scheme B		
Credit		
couple	58.90	60.15
single 25 and over	29.45	30.00
single under 25	23.90	24.40
for working 30 hours+ pw	10.80	11.05
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)		
couple	79.00	80.65
single 25 and over	79.00	80.65
single under 25	79.00	80.65
Both Schemes		
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	fixed rates
amount disregarded	3,000.00	
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit	fixed rate	

Widowed Mothers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the percentage increases in April 1999 in *(a)* benefits, including child benefit, for the first and subsequent children of widowed mothers and *(b)* child benefit for two-parent families; and what is the reason for the differences between the percentages in *(a)* and (b). [59815]

Angela Eagle: The information is set out in the table.

	April 1998 (£)	April 1999 (£)	Increase	Percentage increase
Widowed mother				
First child	21.35	24.30	2.95	13.82
Subsequent children	20.60	20.96	0.35	1.7
Two parent family				
First child	11.45	14.40	2.95	25.76
Subsequent children	9.30	9.60	0.30	3.2

From April 1999 both Child Benefit and the Child Dependency Increases, including those paid to widowed mothers, will be uprated by the Retail Prices Index.

The Child Dependency Increases provide a "top up" to Child Benefit for those who are unable to take up employment. The reason for the difference between the percentages in *(a)* and *(b)* is that legislation specifically provides for the rate of Child Benefit to be taken into account when determining the levels of child dependency increases. The method is to calculate what the child

dependency increase would be if the general uprating percentage were applied, and then to deduct the actual cash increase in Child Benefit. However, from next April, the standard rate of Child Benefit for the eldest child will increase by an additional £2.50, increasing to £2.60 after uprating. To ensure that families on other benefits, including widowed mother's allowance, gain equally from this additional measure they will receive the full £2.60 in addition to the normal uprating.

Benefits (Expenditure)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money has been paid out in *(a)* industrial injuries benefit, *(b)* disability living allowance, *(c)* incapacity benefit, *(d)* income support and *(e)* widows pension in each of the last five years for which figures are available at current prices. [59995]

Mr. Timms: The information is set out in the table.

Expenditure on the above benefits for the period 1992–93 to 1996–97

£ million

Expenditure (1997–98 prices)	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Industrial Injuries Benefits	756	758	769	773	762
Disability Living Allowance	2,236	3,060	3,401	4,021	4,615
Incapacity Benefit	—	—	—	8,062	7,861
Invalidity/Sickness Benefit	7,450	8,205	8,758	299	—
Income Support	16,761	17,784	17,836	17,654	14,820
Widows Benefit	1,145	1,148	1,112	1,075	1,007

Notes:
1. Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit were replaced by a single Incapacity Benefit in April 1995.
2. Income Support to the unemployed was replaced by Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based) in October 1996.

Source:
Departmental Report 1998

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *167*, concerning the Benefit Integrity Project, when the special working group will be set up. [60302]

Mr. Timms: At the Disability Benefits Forum meeting on 9 November 1998 it was agreed that a separate working group, comprising a small number of the Forum members and officials, should discuss proposals for a new, active, modern service for Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance; including the replacement of the Benefits Integrity Project. Forum members who expressed an interest have been contacted and the first meeting of the working group, planned for December, is currently being organised.

Residential Living Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *163–64*, concerning residential living allowance, when officials were asked to consider whether residential allowance is meeting the objectives of community care, and for what reasons. [60304]

Angela Eagle: Officials began reviewing whether Residential Allowance meets the objectives of community care as part of the comprehensive spending review launched last year. This was in the context of identifying if there were any perverse incentives in the system, and of ensuring that resources are used in the most cost-effective way to produce the best outcomes for adults receiving community care services.

Benefits (Parliamentary Scrutiny)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to ensure that all changes to the eligibility criteria for disability living allowance and attendance allowance are subject to parliamentary scrutiny. [60274]

Mr. Timms: All legislation is subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. It is already possible to change the eligibility criteria for Disability Living Allowance through regulations which are subject to the negative resolution. We propose to introduce similar powers for Attendance Allowance.

Disability Living Allowance (Children)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the mobility component of disability living allowance to children aged under five years; and when such changes will take effect. [60273]

Mr. Timms: Entitlement to the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance will be extended to 3 and 4-year-old severely disabled children who have difficulties walking. There is no firm date for implementation, but it is unlikely to be before April 2001.

Expenditure

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1182*, concerning the absence of revisions to social security expenditure plans since the Comprehensive Spending Reviews, what factors underlie the difference between the social security benefit line in Table 2 of the Comprehensive Spending Review and Table B12 of the pre-Budget report. [60295]

Mr. Darling: Revisions to the forecasts of Social Security expenditure published in the Pre-Budget Report reflect new information about caseloads and economic assumptions.

Mr. M. E. Hatcher

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reinstate the *(a)* medium rate and *(b)* high rate of disability living allowance awarded for life on 11 March 1997 to Mr. M. E. Hatcher, 1 Raddicombe Drive, Brixham, Devon; and if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying its withdrawal. [59715]

Mr. Timms: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 16 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will reinstate the (a) medium rate and (b) high rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) awarded for life on 11 March 1997 to Mr M.E. Hatcher, 1 Raddicombe Drive, Brixham, Devon: and if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying its withdrawal.

It may be helpful if I explain that entitlement to DLA does not depend on the diagnosis of a condition but on the way in which that condition affects a person on a day to day basis. Decisions are made by Adjudication Officers (AOs) who are statutory office holders. It would be improper for me to comment on, or interfere in their decisions. I can confirm that although an award of DLA may be given for life an AO may reduce or revoke an award on review if the information received indicates that a person's entitlement to DLA has changed.

Mr Hatcher's DLA was reviewed on 29 July 1998 after he requested his care component be uprated to the highest rate. It is for the AO to decide what evidence is required in order to reach a decision. The evidence used by the AO included the review request, a DLA claim pack received on 19 May 1998, and a report the AO requested from Mr Hatcher's GP. The evidence indicated that Mr Hatcher's care and mobility needs had reduced and he was no longer entitled to benefit.

A further review request provided more information from Mr Hatcher. The AO considered this evidence and decided that he had sufficient night needs for an award of middle rate care only from 2 May 1998 to 1 November 1999 but maintained the decision relating to the mobility component.

Since Mr Hatcher's latest request for a review, the AO decided, with advice from a Benefits Agency Medical Advisor, that a report from the Examining Medical Practitioner should be obtained. Mr Hatcher was invited to attend an examination on 6 November 1998. The doctor who was to carry out the examination has confirmed that the appointment was cancelled on 5 November 1998. A further appointment will not be arranged.

I am sorry I cannot be more conclusive within this reply.

Pension Schemes (Annuities)

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Government have to change the rules governing small self-administered pension scheme annuities. [59323]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

For many types of pension scheme the purchase of an annuity is the only means to guarantee that a pension can be paid for life (which is a requirement of pension scheme rules). This includes small self-administered schemes, but the trustees of these pension schemes have broad flexibility over the timing of an annuity purchase. We have no plans to change this flexibility.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement; [60120]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [60118]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector including British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. and the Post Office. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of departments' plans which have been published and placed in the Libraries of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Libraries of the House and on the internet.

Miners' Widows (Compensation)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the exclusions regarding the compensation claims for widows of miners, other than miners who have suffered from chest diseases. [59373]

Mr. Battle: There are no exclusions regarding valid compensation claims from widows of miners for any diseases or accidents where British Coal have been found liable or liability has been accepted.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what value for money criteria Ministers have introduced regarding the compensation for widows of miners who have suffered chest diseases; [59369]

(2) what estimate he has made of the savings resulting from excluding widows of miners from compensation claims; [59371]

(3) if he will make a statement on the consultation undertaken by his Department regarding the exclusion of widows of miners from compensation claims; [59368]

(4) when he expects to reach a conclusion on policy concerning the exclusion of widows of miners from compensation claims; [59370]

(5) what limits his Department has introduced for compensation claims for widows of miners. [59372]

Mr. Battle: There has never been any intention to exclude widows with valid claims from receiving compensation. Our policy has always been that widows should be compensated fairly and in accordance with their legal entitlement. With regard to the British Coal respiratory disease litigation, we have put our proposals for dealing with claims from widows to the plaintiffs' solicitors and these are currently under discussion. We must ensure that the final arrangements are robust enough properly to validate claims and are fair to claimants. To this end, medical advisers met last week to address certain issues which should help to iron out the remaining problems quickly and put us in a position to begin making offers very shortly. We have made it clear previously that the necessary funds are available for settling all these claims.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the motor industry of the proposed multilateral agreement on investment; [59534]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on the textile and clothing industry of the proposed multilateral agreement on investment. [59535]

Mr. Wilson: In developing their policy towards the MAI, the Government considered the impact that it might have on all sectors of the UK economy. We did not identify any particular sectoral impact to be expected from the MAI in either the motor industry or the textiles and clothing industry.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the changes to his Department's policies on the proposed multilateral agreement on investment. [59656]

Mr. Wilson: It is now most unlikely that an MAI will be concluded and it is better to start afresh in another forum, following full and open consultation with interested parties. The Government's support for separate negotiations on investment in the WTO as part of a comprehensive Round of multilateral negotiations has remained unchanged.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the relative merits of conducting negotiations on the proposed multilateral agreement on investment through *(a)* OECD, *(b)* WTO and *(c)* UNCTAD. [59536]

Mr. Wilson: Following the French withdrawal last month from negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in the OECD, it appears most unlikely that the Agreement will be concluded. There is no prospect of the MAI being negotiated in any other forum. However, the Government—and the EU as a whole—have a long-standing objective of pursuing investment negotiations in the WTO, and have called for investment to be on the agenda of any future multilateral Round of negotiations. Although UNCTAD is not a negotiating

forum for rules of this kind, it has been carrying out analytical work on investment issues and the Government would expect it to add its expertise to any WTO negotiation.

Change Bureaux

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will investigate possible price-fixing of commissions charged by change bureaux at Heathrow airport. [59522]

Dr. Howells: Under the competition legislation, the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring markets and considering allegations of anti-competitive behaviour, abuse of monopoly power or restrictive trade practices.

If anyone has evidence of anti-competitive behaviour by change bureaux at Heathrow Airport, they should send this to the Director General.

Turkey

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans ministers in his Department have to visit Turkey. [59542]

Mr. Wilson: I am planning to visit Turkey in Spring 1999.

Supermarkets

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to refer the profit margins enjoyed by supermarkets to *(a)* the Office of Fair Trading and *(b)* the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement. [60313]

Dr. Howells: Under UK competition legislation, the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring markets and considering allegations of anti-competitive behaviour, abuse of monopoly power or restrictive trade practices. The Office of Fair Trading is currently examining the profitability of the major supermarkets in the grocery sector. The decision on whether to make a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is a matter for the Director General.

Interest Rates

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement about the responses of the credit card companies to the recent reductions in the base interest rate; [59902]

(2) what assessment he has made of the readiness of the different sectors of the financial services industry to reduce interest rates charged by them following reductions in the base interest rate; [59901]

(3) if he will consult with representatives of the credit card companies with a view to securing reductions in the interest rates that they charge; [59903]

(4) if he will introduce legislation to control the interest rates charged by credit card companies. [59904]

Dr. Howells: It is for lenders themselves to determine the interest rates they will charge according to their own commercial judgment.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many projects in receipt of RSA have received offers of regional selective assistance from sources in more than one of England, Scotland and Wales. [59875]

Mrs. Roche: We do not keep a record of such projects and to obtain details would involve disproportionate costs.

Robert Maxwell Companies

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) on what dates the noble Lord Donoughue was interviewed by Department of Trade investigators in connection with Robert Maxwell companies; [57666]

(2) on what dates the right hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell) was interviewed by Department of Trade investigators in connection with Robert Maxwell companies. [57665]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* Inspectors were appointed under Companies Act powers to investigate and report on the affairs and membership of Mirror Group Newspapers plc. They were asked to look, in particular, at the offers for sale of the company's shares in early 1991.

They have not yet completed their inquiries, which are conducted in private. It is not our policy to comment on which individuals may or may not have been seen by the inspectors.

Royal Observatory

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which body will have responsibility for the former buildings and remaining equipment on the site of the former Royal Observatory at Greenwich following its removal to Herstmonceux Castle. [60102]

Mr. Battle: The National Maritime Museum became responsible for the former Royal Observatory buildings at Greenwich and for much of the historically important scientific equipment they housed, following the removal to Herstmonceux Castle in 1948 of the Royal Greenwich Observatory with its continuing scientific programme.

The Royal Greenwich Observatory moved from Herstmonceux to Cambridge in 1990 and ceased operating there at the end of October 1998 with the transfer of the major elements of its scientific programme and associated equipment to other institutions, including the new Astronomy Technology Centre at Edinburgh, the telescope facilities on the island of La Palma, the University of Cambridge, the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils and the National Maritime Museum. The RGO's remaining historical artefacts have also been returned to Greenwich.

Railtrack

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the

impact on manufacturing supplier industries of Railtrack's halt in spending on its track and signalling renewal programme. [58842]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* I am not in a position to offer an assessment of Railtrack's ordering policy, or its ongoing infrastructure investment programme. Railtrack is now a private sector, commercial company, and will make its investment decisions in the light of its own priorities and obligations under its network Management Statement, produced for the Rail Regulator, under its Network Licence, and the Government will expect Railtrack to meet these obligations.

Compensation Claims

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the latest year for which figures are available. [59053]

Dr. Howells: In the Financial Year 1997–98, the DTI (including its Executive Agencies) paid a total of £10,590 to its employees or ex-employees in respect of compensation for personal injury. In the same period, no awards were made to employees or ex-employees by the Civil Service Appeals Board or Employment Tribunals in respect of employment protection compensation.

WALES

Farming Subsidies

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the amount of money lost by Welsh farmers as the result of delays in the administration of farming subsidy payment system; and if he will make a statement. [59317]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I appreciate the problems which can be caused but Welsh farmers do not lose their entitlement to subsidies because of delays. The vast majority of payments are made within EC deadlines.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will assess the amount of farming subsidy currently being lost by Welsh farmers as the result of farmers inaccurately filling out subsidy claims; and if he will make a statement. [59318]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not collected. An average of between 1 and 2% of claims are rejected annually in Wales. These may be rejected for a number of reasons including instances where farmers inaccurately fill out subsidy claims.

Wrexham to Bidston Rail Link

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he plans with North West Rail concerning the future of Sunday services on the Wrexham to Bidston rail link. [59515]

Mr. Hain: None. Sunday services on the Wrexham to Bidston line are supported financially by a consortium of local authorities, and I understand that an agreement is now in place which should ensure the continuation of these services up to and including the Summer 1999 timetable.

Rail Freight

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his recent efforts to transfer freight from road to rail. [59510]

Mr. Hain: The Government's proposals to encourage more freight to transfer from road to rail were set out in the Transport White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" and the Welsh Transport Policy Statement "Transporting Wales into the Future". The plan for a European rail freight terminal at Wentloog will provide a major boost to the rail freight industry in Wales. There has also been a significant increase in the level of interest in our Freight Facilities Grant which should result in further projects to transfer freight from road to rail.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses have been built by the local authority housing departments in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [59514]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information on the number of new dwellings completed annually by local authorities may be found in table 2.3 of Welsh Housing Statistics, 1998, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Schools (Delegated Funding)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the response to the Welsh Office consultation paper, Fair Funding: Improving Delegation to Schools; if the Government plan a further consultation document reflecting the response to the initial proposals; what further opportunities local education authorities and others will have to discuss the changes before they are implemented; when any changes are expected to come into force; and if he will ensure that the National Assembly for Wales is able to discuss them before a final decision is taken. [59379]

Mr. Hain: I announced my decisions on the proposals contained in the consultation paper Fair Funding: Improving Delegation to Schools on 23 September. A copy of my press release is in the Library. From April 1999, the new funding framework described in Fair Funding will replace the present systems of Local Management of Schools and grant-maintained school funding which operate under the Education Act 1996. The changes meet our commitment to fairer funding and greater delegation whilst ensuring that local education authorities have the resources to provide those services which have to be delivered centrally.

Since my announcement, the Welsh Office has issued the following documents to LEAs and others for consideration:

- the outline scheme and draft regulations under section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 which contain detailed provisions relating to schemes of delegation;
- draft regulations under section 46 of the Act which define the Local Schools Budget and identify those items that an authority may deduct from the LSB in order to arrive at the amount to be delegated to its school;

draft regulations under section 47 of the Act which prescribe the factors, criteria and requirements that LEAs need to take into account when deciding their budget allocation formulae;

a consultation paper on the delegation of funding for school meals; and

a consultation paper on the funding of grant-maintained schools in 1999–2000.

Copies of each of these have been placed in the Library.

Under section 138 of the Act, the first regulations to be made under sections 46–48 have to be approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament. The draft regulations will be laid shortly.

We want to make the budgeting of the LEAs for education more transparent; to relate the budget to the role of LEAs in improving standards; and to secure improved delegation to schools. We want schools and local authorities to reap the benefits from the changes as soon as possible. The National Assembly will be able to review what has been done and make changes if it wishes using its secondary legislation powers.

European Development Funds

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department is taking to secure for *(a)* Gwynedd and *(b)* other areas in Wales, full development area status in his current review of the assisted areas map. [59378]

Mr. Hain: Derogation 92(3)(a) is the highest level of Assisted Area status. To qualify, a NUTSII area must have per capita GDP of less than 75 per cent. of the EU average. The UK agreed a new set of NUTS boundaries with Eurostat on 29 June. The Government have written to the EC confirming that they wish the new NUTS boundaries to be used in the definition of areas to be assisted under derogation 92(3)(a). Recent ONS GDP figures indicate that the West Wales and the Valleys NUTSII area, which includes Gwynedd, could be eligible for derogation 92(3)(a).

Teachers (Funding)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by county, the names of schools that have received extra funding to employ Key Stage 1 teachers. [59579]

Mr. Hain: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Economic Inactivity

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the current economic inactivity rates are for each *(a)* county and *(b)* constituency in Wales. [59580]

Mr. Hain: It is estimated from the Labour Force Survey that 26 per cent. of the working age population in Wales were economically inactive in the period July-September 1998. The corresponding rate for all people aged 16 or over was 42 per cent. The latest economic inactivity rates for each unitary authority in Wales are for 1996 and are shown in the following table. Inactivity rates are not available at a constituency level.

Economic inactivity rates by unitary authority, 1996 [1]

Percentage, not seasonally adjusted

Unitary authority	*Economic inactivity rate*[2] *All aged 16+*	*All aged 16–59/64*
Blaenau Gwent	49	33
Bridgend	35	21
Caerphilly	46	32
Cardiff	36	20
Carmarthenshire	44	25
Ceredigion	41	21
Conwy	46	25
Denbighshire	49	24
Flintshire	37	21
Gwynedd	43	25
Isle of Anglesey	50	31
Merthyr Tydfil	41	28
Monmouthshire	38	22
Neath Port Talbot	46	33
Newport	37	25
Pembrokeshire	39	24
Powys	36	18
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	46	31
Swansea	46	28
The Vale of Glamorgan	42	24
Torfaen	34	19
Wrexham	43	26
Wales	42	25

[1] Data relate to the period March 1996-February 1997

[2] Total economically inactive as a percentage of all persons in the relevant age group

Source:

Labour Force Survey 1996 Local Authority Database, Office for National Statistics

Long-term Illness

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the incidence is of limiting long-term illness in each of the 22 authorities in Wales [59578]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The latest available information on long-term illness is provided by the 1997 Welsh Household Interview Survey, a sample survey of people living in domestic properties throughout Wales. People living in institutions or communal establishments, such as residential homes for the elderly, are excluded, as are people living in second or holiday homes. The available information is given in the following table:

Estimated numbers and percentages of people in occupied first homes with a long-standing illness or disability, by local authority

Local authority area	*Number of people with a long-term illness or disability*	*As a % of the total population in occupied first homes*	*Total population in occupied first homes*
Isle of Anglesey	11,400	16.6	68,700
Gwynedd	15,300	13.7	112,000
Conwy	15,500	13.7	112,800
Denbighshire	14,200	15.7	90,600
Flintshire	20,700	15.1	137,400
Wrexham	20,300	15.7	129,300
Powys	14,200	11.8	120,300
Ceredigion	7,900	12.7	62,300
Pembrokeshire	13,500	12.5	107,800
Carmarthenshire	35,200	20.9	169,000
Swansea	41,300	18.4	225,000
Neath Port Talbot	28,200	20.0	141,200
Bridgend	23,000	17.0	135,400
The Vale of Glamorgan	17,900	15.2	117,700
Cardiff	40,400	13.1	307,300
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	46,200	19.3	239,100
Merthyr Tydfil	12,500	20.9	59,600

Estimated numbers and percentages of people in occupied first homes with a long-standing illness or disability, by local authority

Local authority area	*Number of people with a long-term illness or disability*	*As a % of the total population in occupied first homes*	*Total population in occupied first homes*
Caerphilly	33,700	20.0	168,100
Blaenau Gwent	16,100	22.7	70,800
Torfaen	16,400	18.1	90,600
Monmouthshire	8,000	9.8	81,300
Newport	22,300	16.0	139,300
Wales	474,100	16.4	2,885,500

Source:
1997 Welsh Household Interview Survey

Flooding

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what help is being offered to those who have suffered from the recent floods. [59612]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: It is recognised that the recent floods caused much distress and that there are those who were not insured. To people receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance, help for flood victims may be available from the Social Fund by way of community care grants, or interest-free budgeting loans. People not on income support may be eligible for a crisis loan. There has been recent guidance to all Social Fund staff on the payment of grants to disaster victims.

Education Funding

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the projected increase in education funding for each county in Wales for each of the next three years. [59582]

Mr. Hain: In July this year, we announced indicative increases in education spending of £110m in 1999–2000, £250m in 2000–01 and £370m in 2001–02. These include increases in local authority spending on education.

Final decisions on allocations for education and other services will be made taking account of the consultation on the comprehensive spending review and will be announced later in the Autumn.

Pwllheli Planning Appeal

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will arrange for the planning appeal public inquiry, scheduled to be heard at Pwllheli on 2 February 1999, to be conducted by an inspector who is proficient in both the Welsh and English languages. [59760]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Chief Planning Inspector has written to the right hon. Gentleman explaining that no bi-lingual Inspector is available to conduct this inquiry but that simultaneous translation facilities will be provided. I will put a copy of his letter in the Library. In error, the Chief Planning Inspector's letter gives the date of the inquiry as 2 February; in fact the date is 9 February.

The provision of Inspectors is a matter for the Planning Inspectorate and the arrangements proposed are consistent with the Inspectorate's approved Welsh Language Scheme.

Midwives (Salary)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which NHS trusts in Wales *(a)* have and *(b)* have not implemented the Government's recommendation to ensure that midwives working as the lead professional are awarded a minimum F-grade salary. [59986]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is not available in the form requested. The Government accepted last year's nurses pay review body recommendation, which urged the Health Departments to ensure implementation of the 1995 agreement, whereby any changes in midwives' roles and responsibilities should be reflected in their grading and pay. A recent questionnaire sent to NHS Trusts seeking information on the grading and role of midwives is still being analysed. A summary of the responses will be submitted as supplementary evidence to the pay review body and will be placed in the Library of the House at the same time.

Water Budget Payment Units

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homes in Wales had their water disconnected following the installation of water budget payment units by Hyder in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [59911]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not available to the company. Its present technology does not enable the interruption of supplies to customers to be monitored directly.

The Government's recent consultation paper "Water Charging in England and Wales—A New Approach" welcomed the High Court ruling that budget payment meters which cut off the flow of water were unlawful. A response to this consultation exercise is to be published by the Government shortly.

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homes in Wales have water budget units. [59912]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I am advised that Dwr Cymru presently has 24,243 watercard customers in its area of supply. Neither of the other two water supply companies operating in Wales, Severn Trent and Dee Valley Water, offers water budget units to its customers as a means of paying for water.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement; [60148]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [60146]

Mr. Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston

(Maria Eagle), 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government Departments' and Agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector including Local Authorities and the NHS in Wales. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of Departments' plans which have been published in the libraries of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Libraries of the House and on the internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60147]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend the President of the Council presents quarterly reviews to Parliament of progress on tackling all issues, including progress on remedial work, relating to the Millennium date change problem across central Government and the wider public sector. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of Departments' plans, which have been placed in the Libraries of the House and on the Internet. The next review to Parliament will be presented shortly and will provide a report on progress to date in my Department.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60149]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend the President of the Council presents quarterly reviews to Parliament of progress on tackling all issues relating to the Millennium date change problem across central Government and the wider public sector. The next review to Parliament will be presented shortly. In accordance with the response of my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to the PAC recommendations in October, my Department will complete risk assessments and have initial year 2000 business continuity plans in place by the end of January 1999.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the demand for the full-time education and training option under the new deal *(a)* nationally, *(b)* by region and *(c)* for each category of intake during 1998–99 and for each of the next three years. [59188]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The choices will be for the young people to make, but we expect nationally around a fifth to make up the education and training option. This may vary a little regionally.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost per 18 to 24 year old of options completed under the new deal for young people *(a)* nationally, *(b)* by Pathfinder area and *(c)* by new deal option. [59197]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The unit costs for each option, which apply to all units of delivery, are as follows:

Voluntary Sector (VS) Option; £2,750

Environment Task Force (ETF) Option; £2,750

Full Time Education and Training (FTET) Option; £2,300

Subsidised Employment Option; £2,070.

Contracts were negotiated around these costs and will be monitored accordingly as new deal clients flow into, and subsequently complete, the options. The actual costs incurred will be monitored and systems are being put in place to do so. Information will be available early next year. Significant numbers will not complete new deal options until the first quarter of next year.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people aged 18 to 25 years have enrolled on the New Deal; and what percentage of these are *(a)* male, *(b)* disabled and *(c)* from ethnic minorities. [59783]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The number of young people joining New Deal for 18–24 years olds between January and the end of September is 165,600. A breakdown of this figure is possible only for the 148,100 starting before the end of August. Of these *(a)* 72% are male, *(b)* 13% are disabled, and *(c)* 13% are from ethnic minorities.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by region those employers which had unfilled vacancies for new deal trainees and the number of vacancies involved in each case at the latest available date. [59185]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *236*. Over 29,000 employers have signed up to New Deal leading to 54,000 New Deal job pledges. New Deal participants are also, of course, eligible to apply for other jobs. At present, further employer-related information is unavailable.

Lip Reading Classes

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what measures he is taking to ensure that all people who lose their hearing have the opportunity to attend lip reading classes; [59314]

(2) what advice he has given to local education authorities on *(a)* the provision of and *(b)* the charging for lip reading classes; [59315]

(3) what proposals he has to promote courses on lip reading through the Further Education Funding Council. [59316]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State acknowledges the importance of training in lip reading in helping to secure the communication needs of deaf people.

The availability of courses in further education colleges is a matter for local decision, although the Further Education Funding Council has a duty to secure adequacy

and sufficiency of provision for which it is responsible; and, in doing so, to have regard to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Similarly, the range of adult education courses offered by local authorities is decided locally, and the Secretary of State has issued no guidance on how they might do so. All authorities are, however, required to publish annual statements containing details of the further educational provision that they make for disabled people, and the relevant facilities which are available.

Class Sizes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the changes which have been made to Form 7 data collection for the calculation of class sizes in England since January. [59193]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Copies of the data collection forms for maintained primary and secondary schools for January 1998 and 1999 have been placed in the Library.

Head Teachers (Secondment)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by local education authority the percentage of head teachers on secondment for one term or longer for the most recent year for which the information is available. [59194]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This information is not held centrally.

Rural Schools

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what factors are taken into account when deciding whether to allow the closure of a village or rural school; and what the timescale is for such a decision-making process. [59600]

Ms Estelle Morris: When considering proposals for the closure of a rural school, all factors bearing on the proposals will be taken into account, although the presumption will be against closure. Factors that will be considered will include the overall supply of school places in the area and the likely future demand for places; any points made by the Local Education Authority or by the school proposed for closure or by other schools; the standard of the school that is proposed for closure and the standards and accessibility of alternative schools; the views of parents and other interested parties; the overall effect of the closure on the local community; and the cost implications of the possible options. The aim is to reach a decision within five months of the date of publication of the proposals.

Access to Work

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *137*, if a councillor who is disabled and can prove that his activities as a councillor are his main paid employment will be eligible for Access to Work support. [60300]

Ms Hodge: Access to Work provides help for disabled people in, or about to start, paid employment. It is designed to encourage employers to take on, or retain, disabled people by meeting some or all of the extra costs resulting from disability. The aim is to help disabled people in activities from which they earn their living. Activities as a councillor are not themselves regarded as paid employment, but disabled councillors may be eligible for Access to Work support where they are also in paid employment.

Education Action Zones

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each education action zone the financial contribution from business in the form of *(a)* cash and *(b)* services or donations in kind. [60268]

Ms Estelle Morris: Each of the first 25 Education Action Zones must raise £250,000 from the private sector in the first year, whether in cash or kind. They are well on the way to achieving this. I will publish a complete set of information as soon as it is available.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what reason underlies the rule that a person who has been in prison has to have been unemployed for two years prior to his or her imprisonment in order to qualify for support under the Welfare to Work Scheme. [59380]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There is no such rule. Anyone leaving prison and claiming JSA will be able immediately to take advantage of a whole range of help including work-based training, trial periods with employers and help with jobsearch. If, after a year, they are still unemployed and claiming JSA, they can, at ES's discretion, begin on the New Deal advisory process when they will, in addition to the provision mentioned before, qualify for the £75 a week employer subsidy and the opportunity to study or train full-time on JSA. All this is regardless of their previous work history. If, however, they have experienced a number of spells of unemployment-related benefits in the past, interrupted only by short periods, they may qualify for the New Deal as soon as they claim JSA.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in developing and publishing a Special Educational Needs Action Programme. [59761]

Ms Estelle Morris: Consultation on the Green Paper, *Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs*, generated many thoughtful ideas and comments. In the light of these, and the advice of the National Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs (SEN), we published *Meeting Special Educational Needs: A programme of action* on 5 November. The Action Programme sets out the practical steps we will take to support and promote developments in SEN over the next few years. Copies were sent to all MPs and are also available in the Library.

Education Funding (Bids)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those additional funds that have been made available to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools through a bidding process

since May 1997 indicating for each aspect of funding the numbers of bids received and the number of recipients of funding. [59832]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The information requested is currently being collected and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

National Grid for Learning

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many hits each week were recorded on the National Grid for Learning website between April and October. [59191]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Between the weeks beginning 2 April and ending 4 November, 11,285,679 hits were recorded on the main servers for the prototype National Grid for Learning at BECTA, at an average rate of 364,054 hits per week. This excludes hits on numerous other servers to which the NGfl provides onward direction. A weekly breakdown is provided in the following table.

'Hits' on the National Grid for Learning website between 2 April and 4 October 1998

Date	*Number of 'hits'*
2–8 April	247,257
9–15 April	159,401
16–22 April	229,988
23–29 April	245,941
30 April-6 May	257,864
7–13 May	294,393
14–20 May	278,607
21–27 May	313,633
28 May-3 June	322,644
4–10 June	300,961
11–17 June	313,210
18–24 June	343,108
25 June-1 July	351,735
2–8 July	376,178
9–15 July	341,823
16–22 July	335,454
23–29 July	355,927
30 July-5 August	358,764
6–12 August	302,818

'Hits' on the National Grid for Learning website between 2 April and 4 October 1998

Date	*Number of 'hits'*
13–19 August	308,894
20–26 August	258,089
27 August-2 September	306,171
3–9 September	397,292
10–16 September	443,707
17–23 September	437,001
24–30 September	486,867
1–7 October	594,884
8–14 October	513,444
15–21 October	651,156
22–28 October	582,455
29 October-4 November	576,004
Total	11,285,679

European Citizenship

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the teaching of European Citizenship in European Community projects in schools. [59808]

Ms Estelle Morris: Under the EU SOCRATES programme, UK schools are co-operating with schools in other European countries on a wide range of subjects of mutual interest. No current project under this programme involving UK schools has European citizenship as its subject.

Science Teachers

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many science graduates completed teacher training broken down by subject into *(a)* chemistry, *(b)* physics and *(c)* biology, (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage of the total graduates completing teacher training in each year between 1993 and 1997. [57079]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The number of graduates in Chemistry, Physics and Biology and other related sciences who completed a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) in England and Wales between 1993 and 1996 and the number expressed as a percentage of all graduates completing a PGCE are given in the table:

Degree subject	*1993*		*1994*		*1995*		*1996*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Chemistry	470	3.1	530	3.3	580	3.4	520	3.1
Physics	360	2.4	430	2.7	430	2.5	360	2.1
Biology	980	6.5	1,130	7.0	1,330	7.7	1,330	7.9
Engineering	450	3.0	620	3.8	690	4.0	570	3.4
Medical sciences	100	0.7	110	0.7	150	0.9	180	1.1
General sciences	260	1.7	260	1.6	490	2.8	390	2.3

Figures for 1997 are not yet available. Graduates qualified in more than one subject are counted against each relevant subject listed above.

The £130 million package of measures announced by my department on 27 October includes measures intended to increase the number of science graduates recruited to initial teacher training courses.

Employment Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many Employment Service staff have responsibilities which do not include work on the new deal; [59184]

(2) how many and what proportion of Employment Service staff are currently working exclusively on the new deal. [59187]

Mr. Andrew Smith: New Deal is an integral part of the Employment Service's work. No figures are available which show separately staff working exclusively on new deal.

TREASURY

Paracetamol and Aspirin Poisoning

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many deaths have been recorded in England and Wales from poisoning by paracetamol in each of the past five years; [59634]

(2) how many deaths have been recorded in England and Wales from aspirin poisoning in each of the past five years; and in how many of these cases aspirin had been taken in *(a)* soluble and *(b)* dispersible form. [59635]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Donald Gorrie, dated 17 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions on deaths from poisoning by paracetamol and from aspirin.

The information requested is shown in the tables below.

Deaths by year of occurrence from paracetamol poisoning in England and Wales, 1993–97

Year	*Deaths mentioning paracetamol*
1993	316
1994	275
1995	324
1996	279
1997	335

Figures relate to the number of deaths in England and Wales where paracetamol was mentioned on the death certificate. They do not include deaths with a mention of a paracetamol-containing compound e.g. co-proxamol.

Deaths by year of occurrence from aspirin poisoning in England and Wales, 1993–97

Year	*Number of deaths*
1993	25
1994	28
1995	19
1996	32
1997	12

It is not possible to determine from the information collected at death registration whether aspirin was taken in soluble or dispersible form.

The deaths were identified as those with an underlying cause of death coded to drug dependence, non-dependent abuse of drugs, accidental poisoning, suicidal poisoning and poisoning of undetermined intent.

The figures for deaths where paracetamol or aspirin was mentioned on the death certificate include deaths attributed to the substance in combination with other drugs. Where two or more substances are listed together, the contribution, if any, of each to the death is unknown. Even where one substance is listed alone there may well be other factors with an important bearing on death.

Moreover, coroners do not always record all specific drugs associated with a death on the death certificate. Therefore, with the information available from death registration, it is only possible to give an approximation of the number of deaths associated with or directly due to any particular substance.

Cancer (Survival Rates)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the five-year survival rate for cancer is in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other OECD countries. [59849]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jonathan Sayeed, dated 17 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary question on the five-year survival rate for cancer.

I refer you to my answer of 5 November to Dennis Skinner MP (Hansard number 233, column 682), which gave information on the survival of cancer patients.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the rate of cot death in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 1998 to date. [60012]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Ronnie Fearn, dated 17 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on rates of cot deaths.

The infant mortality rate[1] for England and Wales due to sudden infant death is as follows:

1996 0.65

1997 0.61

1998 Data are not yet available

[1] per 1,000 live births

This information is published in the ONS monitor DH3 98/2 Sudden infant deaths 1993–1997, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Abortions

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of abortions for women in Walthamstow were funded by the NHS in the last three years for which figures are available. [60031]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Neil Gerrard, dated 17 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on NHS abortions in Walthamstow.

Information on the number of abortions performed on residents of each parliamentary constituency is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The ONS routinely publishes abortion statistics by regions and health authorities (HA). The following table shows the percentage of abortions funded by the NHS for residents of Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA.

Percentage of abortions funded by the NHS for residents of Redbridge and Waltham HA, 1995–97

Year	*Percentage*
1995	42
1996	34
1997[1]	42

[1] Provisional figure

Figures for each year from 1995 and 1996 are published in the ONS Annual Reference Volumes: *Abortion statistics series AB* nos. 20–23. Provisional figures for 1997 were published in the ONS Monitor Series AB 98/4 *Legal abortions 1997: residents of regions and health authorities* on 26 June 1998. These are available in the House of Commons library.

Landfill Tax

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on landfill tax in relation to salt extraction companies. [58629]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *100*.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out his estimates of additional public expenditure for each Department on the basis of the same assumptions as underly the calculation that spending on health and education will rise by £40 billion by the end of the Parliament, *(a)* on the Government's proposed accounting conventions and *(b)* treating public expenditure and tax expenditures on the working families tax credit in the same way as expenditure on family credit is currently treated. [58599]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Estimates of the cumulative increase in each department's Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 over and above expenditure planned for the current year, 1998–99, can be calculated from Table B17 in the Pre-Budget Report, which updates Table A4 in the Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper. The figure of £40 billion for additional spending on education and health includes estimates of spending in these areas by the Scottish Office, Welsh Office and Northern Ireland departments, and by local authorities, as well as by the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health.

Expenditure on family credit in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 is included not in DEL but in Annually Managed Expenditure (AME). Payments of working families tax credit from 1999–2000 onwards will also score in AME, in line with the new European System of Accounts. The cumulative increase in AME for 1999–2000 to 2001–02 over 1998–99 can be calculated from Table B12 of the Pre-Budget Report.

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government will press the IMF for *(a)* the publication of all Article IV reports and *(b)* greater transparency of the IMF's accounts. [56528]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 1998]:* In his statement to the Interim Committee of the IMF on 4 October, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the case for publishing in a timely and systematic way all key surveillance and programme documents, including Article IV reports, should be considered. He also said that ways should be found to improve the IMF's own accountability, to ensure that it performs its responsibilities in an open and transparent way that enhances public confidence. As part of that effort, the Chancellor is encouraging the IMF to continue looking for ways to improve the format, readability and clarity of their financial data.

Pensions Mis-selling

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest progress in the review of personal pensions mis-selling. [60382]

Ms Hewitt: Further advances have been made towards completion of the first phase of the review.

On the regulators' advice, a further eight firms who have met their targets for phase 1 of the review have been removed from the Treasury's published list. The eight are Albany Life, Allied Dunbar, Canada Life, Gan, M&E Network, National Westminster, Royal London and Wesleyan Assurance.

Of the 21 firms whose results are set out in the table, only two have resolved less than 75 per cent. of their cases. Seven have now resolved over 90 per cent of their cases.

Substantial progress is now being made with phase 1 of the review. But firms should be clear that it is essential the remaining cases are resolved in line with the regulators' timetable. That means all firms completing phase 1 by the end of December.

The published figures measure firms' progress in assessing whether people are entitled to redress, and, if so, reaching agreement on offers of redress, but that is not the end of the process. It is also important that the redress is delivered as a matter of priority. The regulators will continue to take action against laggards to ensure that investors are properly protected.

Progress by pensions firms in resolving cases of personal pensions mis-selling in the period to the end of October 1998

	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*
50–75% of cases resolved								
Countrywide	5,205	2,644	351	202	149	121	2	57
DBS	2,410	914	939	225	714	514	21	69
Over 75% of cases resolved								
IFA Network	382	119	167	112	55	55	14	75
Burns Anderson	1,278	435	612	242	371	292	23	76

Progress by pensions firms in resolving cases of personal pensions mis-selling in the period to the end of October 1998

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Financial Options	549	330	134	31	72	57	10	76
Windsor Life	9,645	4,104	4,608	326	4,282	3,532	37	83
Abbey Life	18,152	6,434	9,696	1,307	8,389	7,408	41	83
Sun Life of Canada	28,993	11,163	14,722	2,645	12,077	10,636	37	84
Lincoln National	13,581	2,218	10,423	1,409	9,014	7,824	58	84
London and Manchester	8,568	1,578	6,484	703	5,781	5,080	59	86
Standard Life	7,466	901	5,876	1,289	4,587	4,312	58	87
Hill Samuel	6,120	914	4,818	712	4,106	3,742	61	88
Colonial	8,728	3,149	5,161	606	4,555	3,933	45	88
Sedgwick	16,884	9,824	5,512	1,865	3,647	3,255	19	89
CIS	44,681	7,745	36,121	14,132	21,989	18,425	41	90
Berkeley Independent	186	123	47	32	15	13	7	90
Friends Provident	7,120	1,327	5,414	828	4,586	4,315	61	91
Hogg Robinson	2,324	861	1,381	472	909	799	34	92
Equitable Life	7,628	1,967	5,400	1,816	3,584	3,351	44	94
Pearl	47,541	4,640	41,991	5,912	36,079	34,186	72	94
Legal & General	37,044	15,251	21,321	1,993	19,328	17,726	48	94

Notes:
A: cases identified as requiring review.
B: of A, cases where investor was informed that information gained during assessment excluded cases from review.
C: number of assessments completed.
D: cases where the investor has been informed that no redress is due.
E: cases where redress has been offered.
F: cases where redress has been accepted.
G: cases where redress has been accepted as a percentage of cases identified for review ((F/A)x100).
H: cases completed, including exclusions, as a percentage of cases identified for review (((B+D+F)/A)x100).

Petroleum Revenue Tax

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he plans to make to petroleum revenue tax legislation for pipelines in the North Sea. [60383]

Dawn Primarolo: In the next Finance Bill, the Government intend to make a minor change to legislation introduced in the Finance Act 1994 which helped remove possible distortions in North Sea pipeline competition. This change is to ensure that, for pipelines subject to the 1994 rules, tariffs received for transporting oil and gas to the UK from fields in other countries are taxed in the same way as tariffs for transporting oil or gas from new UK fields. This change will allow these pipelines to compete more fairly for the transportation of non-UK oil or gas.

Excise Duties

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue the Government have obtained from the United Kingdom road haulage industry through *(a)* vehicle excise duty for heavy goods vehicles and *(b)* excise duty on diesel since 1 May 1997. [59345]

Ms Hewitt: The amount of revenue raised from VED on Heavy Goods Vehicles from May 1997 to September 1998 was £818 million.

It is not possible to separate the revenue raised from excise duty on diesel paid by the road haulage industry from the total revenue received.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the competitiveness of the United Kingdom road haulage industry of differences in *(a)* vehicle excise duty on heavy goods vehicles and *(b)* excise duty on diesel, between EC nations. [59344]

Ms Hewitt: Impact on competitiveness is one of the factors that the Chancellor takes into account when making decisions on Budget measures.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the rates of *(a)* vehicle excise duty on heavy goods vehicles and *(b)* excise duty on diesel, for each EU country. [59352]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Essex, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *152–53*.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the cost of collection of vehicle excise duty as a result of the proposed changes to the duty set out in the pre-Budget statement. [59666]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The cost will depend on the precise options chosen as a result of consultation.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department contributed to the section on economic and monetary union in the European Communities booklet, "Europe in Ten Bints"; what assessment he has made of the contents of the document; and how many copies of that document have been distributed in the UK. [59789]

Ms Hewitt: HM Treasury did not contribute to the section on Economic and Monetary Union in the European Communities publication "Europe in Ten

Bints". The document is largely factual. It sets out the institutions of the EU and their origins and identifies some of the challenges now faced by the Union. The document is distributed in the UK by the London office of the European Commission. The Commission estimate that around 4,000 copies have been distributed throughout the UK.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *339*, concerning national deposits and share capital in the European Central Bank, if he will tabulate the percentage of the share capital subscribed by each participating state on 1 January 1999. [60112]

Ms Hewitt: In accordance with Article 29 of the ESCB Statute, the formula for the subscription of capital to the ECB is based on Member States' population and GDP. The table gives details of the weightings assigned to national central banks.

The national central banks of participating Member States will be required to pay up the full amount of their subscribed capital in the ECB. In accordance with Article 48 of the Statute of the ESCB, the ECB General Council decided in September that the national central banks of non-participating Member States should pay up 5 per cent. of their shares in the subscribed capital of the ECB. This payment will be made by offset against the proceeds of the liquidation of the EMI.

Capital subscription to the European Central Bank

euro

NCB	*Key percentage*	*Subscribed capital*	*Percentage to be paid up*	*Total amount due*
Germany	24.4096	1,220,480,000	100	1,220,480,000
France	16.8703	843,515,000	100	843,515,000
Italy	14.9616	748,080,000	100	748,080,000
Spain	8.8300	441,500,000	100	441,500,000
Netherlands	4.2796	213,980,000	100	213,980,000
Belgium	2.8885	144,425,000	100	144,425,000
Austria	2.3663	118,315,000	100	118,315,000
Portugal	1.9250	96,250,000	100	96,250,000
Finland	1.3991	69,955,000	100	69,955,000
Ireland	0.8384	41,920,000	100	41,920,000
Luxembourg	0.1469	7,345,000	100	7,345,000
Euro NCBs	78.9153	3,945,765,000	—	3,945,765,000
Non-euro NCBs	21.0847	1,054,235,000	5	52,711,750
Total	100.0000	5,000,000,000	—	3,998,476,750

Exchange Trading Schemes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to expand the experiments in local exchange trading schemes under which unemployed participants in a local area work for each other. [59530]

Mr. Byers: The Government are investigating whether Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) can play an effective role in fostering community cohesion and encouraging unemployed people back into economic activity. The use of LETS is one of the issues being taken forward by the "Jobs" Policy Action Team, one of 18 teams set up as a follow up to the Social Exclusion Unit's report on deprived neighbourhoods "Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal". This team is being headed by my right hon Friend, the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities and will report to the Prime Minister in July 1999.

Monetary Policy Committee

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to measure the effectiveness of the Monetary Policy Committee (i) annually and (ii) over four-year periods; [59528]

(2) if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Monetary Policy Committee to date. [59583]

Ms Hewitt: The task of the Monetary Policy Committee is to set short-term interest rates to meet the Government's inflation target. The success of the new monetary framework is demonstrated by the fact that inflation is at its target, long-term interest rates are currently at their lowest level for over 35 years and inflation expectations have fallen.

Airports (Borrowing)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will allow airports owned by local authorities to borrow on normal commercial terms. [59659]

Mr. Byers: Subject to Parliamentary approval, public sector borrowing controls on financially sound local authority airports would be relaxed from 1 April 1999. This will allow qualifying local authority airports to raise development capital on the money markets to cater for growing demand.

Local authority airport companies will have to meet strict financial criteria before the controls on them are relaxed. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has launched a consultation exercise into the qualifying criteria.

Euro Preparations Unit

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the selection of non-civil servants to serve on the Euro Preparations Unit; on what terms the HSBC Midland secondee is serving; what is his area of expertise; how many other candidates were considered; and if additional non-civil servants will be brought in. [59826]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury encourages inward secondments to promote the exchange of ideas and experience. The secondee from HSBC Midland has been seconded for a period of 12 months, with the possibility of extension, and was selected from a field of candidates with extensive experience in providing advice to SMEs. As with other secondees, he remains the employee, and retains the employment terms, of his parent organisation.

European Central Bank

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assets the United Kingdom is obliged to hand over to the European Central Bank; and at what stage. [59823]

Ms Hewitt: In accordance with Article 48 of the Statute of the ESCB, the ECB General Council decided in September that the national central banks of non-participating Member States should pay up 5 per cent. of their shares in the subscribed capital of the ECB. Unless the UK joins the single currency, the UK will not be required to forward any foreign reserves to the ECB.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement; [60064]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [60066]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. This included the Bank of England. The information requested can be found in the copies of Departments' plans which are available in the Library of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library and on the Internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60067]

Ms Hewitt: Business contingency work is under way in all the Chancellor's Departments and agencies. Existing contingency plans are being reviewed to ensure they cover all the risks the Millennium may bring. This includes embedded chip systems.

Plans include:

manual workarounds;

ensuring key staff are available in the changeover period;

identifying the affect of possible increased demands on business in the period prior to 1 January 2000;

reducing the pressure on normal business processes;

backing up key data;

The Chancellor's Departments comprise:

HM Treasury (and Debt Management Office)

Inland Revenue (and Valuation Office)

HM Customs and Excise

Office for National Statistics

Royal Mint

National Savings

National Investment and Loans Office

Government Actuary's Department

Registry of Friendly Societies.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what (1) estimate he has made of the effect of the millennium bug on the rate of economic growth; [60168]

(2) if the growth forecasts contained in his Pre-Budget Report take account of the effects of the millennium bug; and if he will make a statement. [60169]

Ms Hewitt: The effect of the Millennium bug on the rate of economic growth is considered in the Pre-Budget Report, paragraph A56 and box A2 ("Impact of the 'Year 2000' problem").

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what the growth of United Kingdom GDP would be in 1999, on the basis of the rates of growth of exports and imports assumed in the March 1998 Budget. [59625]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* Analysis of all the effects on the UK economy of the deterioration in the world economic outlook was given in the Pre-Budget Report.

Age Allowances (Pensioners)

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the current value of the age allowances for pensioners *(a)* aged 65 years and over and *(b)* aged 75 years and over in respect of those on a single income of *(a)* £4,045 to £5,220, *(b)* £5,221 to £9,320, *(c)* £9,321 to £15,600 and *(d)* £15,601 to £17,950 and on joint incomes of (i) £7,545 to £10,075, (ii) £10,076 to £14,175, (iii) £14,176 to £15,895 and (iv) £15,895 to £32,555; [60034]

(2) if he will list the value of the age allowance for single pensioners with joint incomes at five yearly intervals for the last 30 years. [60032]

Ms Hewitt: In 1998–99, for a single pensioner aged 65 to 74 years, the personal allowance is as shown in the table:

£

Range of income	Personal allowance
For incomes up to the aged income limit (16,200)	5,410
For incomes between 16,201 and 18,630	5,410 less half of the difference between total income and 16,200
For incomes above 18,630	4,195

In 1998–99, for a single pensioner aged 75 years and over, the personal allowance is:

£

Range of income	Personal allowance
For incomes up to the aged income limit (16,200)	5,600
For incomes between 16,201 and 19,010	5,600 less half of the difference between total income and 16,200
For incomes above 19,010	4,195

For a married pensioner, the value of the allowances available will depend on the ages of the husband and wife and the distribution of income between them.

The historical series are available in the 1997–98 edition of the Tax Benefit Reference Manual which is available in the Library.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the pay bands for each tier of employees at the Financial Services Authority. [60049]

Ms Hewitt: This is a matter for the FSA.

Electronic Commerce

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of a worldwide tax treaty on electronic commerce. [60259]

Ms Hewitt: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is the key forum in which discussions are taking place. A framework for the taxation of electronic commerce was presented to Ministers at the OECD conference on electronic commerce in Ottawa last month, and a future work programme endorsed.

United Kingdom Excessive Deficit

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the amount of the excessive deficit for the United Kingdom decided by the Council of the European Union under Article 104C(6) of the Maastricht Treaty and the Treaty of the European Union; what plans Her Majesty's Government have, pursuant to Council Declaration 11393/97 to comply with the Council recommendation to bring that situation to an end; within which time scale; and what assessment he has made of the impact on UK *(a)* taxation and *(b)* public expenditure. [60008]

Ms Hewitt: As a result of the Government's prudent approach to fiscal policy, the public finances have improved markedly. The Council Recommendation 11393/97 is concerned with the Council Decision of 26 September 1994 on the existence of an excessive deficit in the UK. This Decision was abrogated on 1 May 1998.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statutory force attaches to the EU Council's recommendation of 28 October 1997 that the UK Government achieve a Government deficit that is close to balance when an allowance is made for the economy's cyclical position as projected in the convergence programme; and what extra measures will be required to fulfil this. [60109]

Ms Hewitt: The EU Council's recommendation of 28 October 1997 was non-binding.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he took to implement the EU Council recommendation of 28 October 1997 on an excessive Government deficit in the UK; and if he will publish the new convergence programme he submitted in September 1997. [60105]

Ms Hewitt: As a result of the Government's prudent approach to fiscal policy, the public finances have improved markedly. The decision that the UK had an excessive deficit was abrogated by the Council on 1 May 1998. The September 1997 Convergence Programme was sent to the European Legislation Committee of the House of Commons and the Select Committee on the European Communities of the House of Lords on 4 September 1997.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the EU Council's conclusions of 13 October 1997 on the UK Government deficit. [60108]

Ms Hewitt: The conclusions of the ECOFIN of 13 October 1997 on the UK deficit were concerned with the Council Decision of 26 September 1994 on the existence of an excessive deficit in the UK. This Decision was abrogated on 1 May 1998.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the council decision of 26 September 1974 on Britain's excess in deficit was abrogated; when he applied for this to be abrogated; and if he will make a statement on its impact. [60113]

Ms Hewitt: The Council's decision of 26 September 1994 that the UK had an excessive deficit was abrogated on 1 May 1998.

HEALTH

Aspirin and Paracetamol

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the increase in the retail price for aspirin and paracetamol following the new Department of Health guidelines on pack size; and if he will make a statement. [57872]

Ms Jowell: The Department has received a number of letters from hon. Members and from members of the public since the introduction of new pack sizes for most aspirin and paracetamol products which became a statutory requirement on 16 September 1998.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many cases in England and Wales in each of the past five years individuals have had to spend more than one night in hospital because of aspirin poisoning. [59637]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of finished consultant episodes in National Health Service trusts in England with a primary diagnosis of poisoning by aspirin is shown in the table.

Information relating to health services in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Year	*Number*
1993–94	1,374
1994–95	1,328
1995–96	1,503
1996–97[1]	1,439
1997–98[1]	1,505

[1] For 1996–97 and 1997–98 no adjustments have been made for shortfalls in data

Source:
Hospital Episodes Statistics

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons soluble and effervescent products are exempt from the regulations restricting the number which may be sold in one package to 32; and for what reasons dispersible products are not exempt. [59639]

Ms Jowell: The new measures for aspirin and paracetamol are aimed at reducing toxicity in overdose by limiting pack size for solid (tablet and capsule) formulations available over the counter.

Effervescent and some soluble formulations (which contain at least 75 per cent. carbon dioxide-forming ingredients) are exempt from the new pack size restrictions because they are difficult to swallow in quantity. These tablets will foam, making it difficult to take more than a small number. Powders, granules and suppositories are also exempt for similar reasons.

Dispersible and some soluble preparations are not exempt because, although designed to be dissolved in water, they can easily be swallowed in solid form and so there is potential for abuse.

Loughborough General Hospital

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the completion of a full business case to replace Loughborough's general hospital through a private finance initiative. [57742]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive is expecting to receive a revised full business case from Fosse Health NHS Trust for the scheme to replace Loughborough's General Hospital under the private finance initiative in the next month. It is understood that the best and final offer from the private partner was submitted on 3 November 1998 and the trust are currently considering the case in the light of this information.

Administrative Staff

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many administrative staff were employed by the NHS *(a)* in May 1997, *(b)* in May 1998 and *(c)* in September 1998. [58250]

Mr. Milburn: The number of clerical and administrative staff employed by the National Health Service in England as at 30 September 1997 was 131,860 whole-time equivalents. Figures relating to other times of the year are not collected centrally. Figures for September 1998 are currently being collected and will be published in due course.

Capitation Formula

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he proposes to the NHS capitation formula. [58343]

Mr. Milburn: There were three changes to the target setting process for 1999–2000 health authority allocations:

- the speciality cost weights in the hospital and community health services age adjustment were updated;
- a new additional need adjustment for prescribing was introduced;
- a supplement to the formula was introduced for the extra costs of interpretation, advocacy and translation services for ethnic minority populations who experience difficulties with the English language.

No further changes will be made to the target setting process at least until 2001–02. This is because on 10 November 1998 we announced a wide ranging review of the formula.

Residential Homes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unannounced inspections of *(a)* local authority and *(b)* private sector residential homes for the elderly took place in 1997; and how many and what percentage of the inspection reports were critical of the way in which the elderly residents were treated. [58504]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally. However, my hon. Friend may like to refer to the Social Services Inspectorate publication—Local Authority Social Services Department Registration and Inspection Units Key Data 1996–97—copies of which are available in the Library, for limited information on the number of inspections carried out.

Sensory Loss

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into loss of *(a)* smell and *(b)* taste, as a result of (i) sinusitis and (ii) influenza [59149]

Ms Jowell: The Department's policy research programme and the central National Health Service research and development programmes are not currently supporting any such research.

The Medical Research Council (MRC), which is funded by the Office of Science and Technology, commissions most of the Government's research into bio-medical and clinical issues. The MRC is always open to new sound scientific proposals in competition with other applications. In deciding priorities and taking decisions, the MRC takes account of the Department's priorities, together with input from the health research community in general. The Department's policy research programme supports the formulation of health and social care policy and the

NHS programmes support the needs of the health service. Records are not held centrally of all research carried out in the NHS.

Dentists (Retirement)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have retired before retirement age in each of the last five years; and how many retired on health grounds. [58746]

Mr. Milburn: The number of general dental practitioners retiring before retirement age in England and Wales and the number of these retiring on health grounds are shown in the table.

Year ending March	*Early retirements*	*Of which on grounds of ill-health*
1994	141	40
1995	200	106
1996	212	80
1997	183	91
1998	159	87

Ministerial Visit (West Byfleet)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), visited the West Byfleet Health Centre; and if he gave prior notification to the local hon. Member. [58807]

Mr. Hutton: My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South visited West Byfleet on 14 October 1998. Ministers are fully aware of the need to notify hon. Members of their intention to visit their constituencies. I understand that on this occasion prior notification was not given. I apologise for any embarrassment and inconvenience caused to the hon. Member.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of NHS computer systems which will be millennium-compliant on 1 April 1999. [58846]

Mr. Milburn: The precise information requested is not held centrally. National Health Service organisations are making good progress to ensure that their systems are compliant or that they have contingency arrangements in place by 30 September 1999.

Hospitals (Doncaster)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of operating theatre time in NHS hospitals in the Doncaster area, is devoted to the treatment of *(a)* waiting list patients, *(b)* emergencies, *(c)* other NHS patients, and *(d)* other non-NHS patients, for the most recent period for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [59308]

Mr. Milburn: The central collection of returns relating to theatre use has been discontinued. Since 1994, collection of this data within districts has been a matter for local discretion. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the Chairman of the Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu Hospital National Health Service Trust, Mr. David Kitson.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what number of waiting list patients were treated by hospitals in the Doncaster area as *(a)* day patients and *(b)* in-patients for the years *(a)* 1977, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* 1997, respectively; and if he will make a statement. [59309]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of patients treated by hospitals is available only from 1990–91. The table shows the available information for Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu Hospital National Health Service Trust and Doncaster Healthcare Trust for 1996–97. 1997–98 data are not yet available.

Number of waiting list and elective admissions to Doncaster Trusts: 1996–97

Trust	*Ordinary admissions*	*Day cases*
Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu NHS Trust	10,272	16,513
Doncaster Healthcare NHS Trust[1]	75	0

[1] Doncaster Healthcare Trust is a community and mental health trust

Source:
1996–97 Hospital Episode Statistics

Ear, Nose and Throat Consultants

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants have been employed in NHS ear, nose and throat departments in each of the last five years. [59349]

Mr. Milburn: Information about the number of consultants employed in otolaryngology (Ear, Nose and Throat), on 30 September in each of the last five years for which data are available is shown in the table.

Number of consultants in otolaryngology (ENT) in the National Health Service in England as at 30 September (whole time equivalents):

Year	*Wte*
1992	380
1993	370
1994	370
1995	380
1996	380
1997	400

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Source:
The Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census

NHS Trusts

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has issued to NHS trusts about setting goals for the representation of *(a)* women, *(b)* people from ethnic minorities and *(c)* people with disabilities in the workforce; and if he will make a statement; [59361]

(2) what guidance he has issued to NHS trusts on monitoring and evaluating information collected about the *(a)* gender, *(b)* ethnic origin and *(c)* disability of job applicants. [59360]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* We have recently issued the first ever human resource strategic framework for the National Health Service. One of the strategic aims of *Working Together: Securing a Quality Workforce for the NHS* is that the NHS should have a quality workforce, in the right numbers, with the right skills and diversity, organised in the right way to deliver the Government's service objectives for health and social care. The framework commits trusts to demonstrate year on year progress towards achieving a workforce that is fully representative of the community it serves, at all levels of the organisation. Further guidance on equal opportunities monitoring will be issued in 1999 as part of the work on implementing the human resources framework and integrating it with performance management systems within the NHS.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *1180–81*, what are the latest figures for the number of people in the Mid Essex Hospital NHS Trust area waiting to see a consultant for *(a)* 13 to 25 weeks and *(b)* 26 or more weeks. [59546]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *1180–81*. This provides the latest published figures for outpatient waiting times. Figures for the end of September 1998 will be available shortly.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1180*, how many people in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area had been waiting for treatment for 12 months or more at the latest date for which figures are available. [59905]

Mr. Milburn: At Mid Essex Hospital National Health Service Trust, a total of 1,155 people have been waiting for treatment for 12 months or more as at 30 September 1998.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the total number of people in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area awaiting treatment on *(a)* 31 March 1997 and *(b)* 30 September 1998. [59867]

Mr. Milburn: Mid Essex Hospital National Health Service Trust's total waiting list was 8,391 as at 31 March 1997, and was 11,615 as at 30 September 1998.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his officials have concluded their review of the impact of the introduction of the VAT Order SI 1997/2744; and if he will make a statement. [59895]

Mr. Milburn: Officials have concluded their review of the impact of the introduction of the Value Added Tax Order Statutory Instrument 1997/2744.

They are now working closely with Her Majesty's Treasury officials to finalise the administrative procedures to ameliorate the effect of the VAT Order on the supply of certain renal and cancer drugs and on the supply of pharmaceutical products by retail pharmacists to residents of nursing homes.

The VAT Order also affected certain incontinence supplies. A review of continence policy is currently underway which is intended to ensure that the most appropriate and effective continence services are being planned and delivered.

Nurse Training

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce *(a)* part-time and *(b)* term-time nurse training to assist mature students with family responsibilities. [59331]

Mr. Milburn: We encourage and support the provision of part-time, flexible training. We have announced plans to expand on the existing provision of part-time and flexible pre-registration nursing and midwifery diploma programmes by up to 200 places in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 and by up to 500 places in 2000–01.

Psychiatric Wards

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the number of temporary staff employed on psychiatric wards; and if he will make a statement. [59440]

Mr. Hutton: None. The Government are committed to securing the mental health staff needed to provide high quality services and are therefore increasing training levels for new health professionals and investing in significant additional resources on new initiatives to improve recruitment, retention and return to practice of trained staff.

Influenza Vaccinations

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to local health authorities about the categories of patients who are entitled to receive a free influenza vaccination. [59532]

Ms Jowell: Influenza immunisation is recommended on the National Health Service for all those in whom the disease is more likely to be a serious illness, so immunisation is recommended for:

- those with chronic respiratory, heart or renal disease, diabetes and those who are immunosuppressed
- those living in long stay residential accommodation
- from this year, all those aged 75 and over.

The final decision on whether influenza immunisation is offered rests with the individual's doctor/medical practitioner.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) wrote to doctors and nurses advising them of this extension in policy in a joint letter in August 1998 (Personal Letter/CMO98/4 Personal Letter/CNO/98/6)

and a Health Services Circular (HSC 1998/140) was sent to health authorities. The Department has issued a poster and updated its two leaflets about influenza: 'What should I do about flu' and 'Flu vaccination', available from surgeries and health centres. Copies are available in the Library.

Private Sector Surgery

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the surgical procedures carried out during the last quarter for which published data are available on NHS patients who had been waiting more than 12 months for surgery were carried out in the private sector at the cost of NHS trusts and health authorities. [59585]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mixed Wards

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 141, whether the NHS Executive has issued guidance to NHS trusts only in accordance with the Secretary of State's assurance in the House on 28 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 134, that he would put a stop to the creation of any new mixed wards in NHS psychiatric units. [59643]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service Executive has recently issued guidance to health authorities and trusts about the elimination of mixed sex hospital accommodation, including psychiatric units. The guidance re-emphasises the importance of providing safe facilities for patients in hospital who are mentally ill and which safeguard their privacy and dignity. Guidance to the NHS on the use of capital allocations will ensure capital is invested to eliminate mixed sex accommodation.

Physical Activity (Children)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Department for Education and Employment concerned with ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity of at least one hour of physical activity per day. [59698]

Ms Jowell: The Department collaborates closely with the Department for Education and Employment to develop ways of increasing levels of physical activity among children and young people. As part of the healthy schools initiative, both Departments are working on plans to develop an active and safe travel to school challenge. This work complements the "Young and Active" report, which I launched in September, and which set out a framework for improving physical activity levels among children aged between 5 and 18.

Mental Health (Leeds)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of *(a)* the Audit Commission's comparison between Leeds and other major cities in respect of expenditure per head on mental health services and *(b)* the recent net closure of eight acute psychiatric beds in Leeds prior to the reprovision of community alternatives; and why there was not formal public consultation over the closure. [59763]

Mr. Hutton: Decisions about mental health care and the use of the increased resources made available by this Government are best taken at local level, because it is at local level that people's needs are best known and where services can be tailored to them. It is the responsibility of Leeds Health Authority to assess the health care needs of their population, to draw up strategies and commissioning plans in collaboration with local people, general practitioners and other organisations, and to secure a range of hospital and community health services to meet those needs.

The Leeds Community and Mental Health Trust is currently developing a modernisation programme that includes a range of capital developments to reprovide mental health services in Leeds. The introduction of these schemes will allow the closure of the existing facilities which are outdated and in much need of replacement. The health authority has discussed its plans with the community health council.

New-variant CJD

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the information collected under paragraphs 11(1) and 11(3) of Schedule 9 to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 allows his Department to trace other patients on the same operating list as the patient carrying the infective agent of new-variant CJD at Torbay; and if the hospital concerned has listed the employees involved in the operation in accordance with these paragraphs. [59978]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* No. The patient's diagnosis was unknown at the time and no such Control of Substances Hazardous to Health record was kept.

Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons he did not re-appoint Mr. Martyn Long CBE DL for a second term as Chairman of the Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust. [60045]

Mr. Milburn: Mr. Long's application was considered alongside other possible candidates according to the Department's procedures for the appointment of National Health Service board members, details of which are available in the Library.

It is made clear to all those invited to serve on National Health Service boards that the appointment is for a set term of office, and there can be no presumption of re-appointment.

Primary Care Groups

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on how pharmacists should be represented in primary care groups. [60191]

Mr. Milburn: Primary Care Groups will need to draw upon all the experience and expertise of their stakeholders

to develop and implement local policies. Pharmacists are recognised as important stakeholders in the community.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *87–88*, concerning Primary Care groups, if he will set out the ways in which elected members of local authorities will have an enhanced opportunity to influence the development and implementation of health care arrangements. [60298]

Mr. Milburn: The local strategy for improving health and healthcare will be set through the Health Improvement Programme (HImP). The development of the HImP will be led by the health authority in partnership with the local National Health Service, relevant local authorities and the wider local community. This offers the opportunity for the local community and its leaders e. g., local Councillors, to influence the strategy. This approach will be underpinned, subject to Parliamentary approval, by new statutory duties of partnership between NHS bodies and local authorities to promote the health and wellbeing of their local populations.

EC Health Council

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the outcome of the EC Health Council meeting on 12 November. [60471]

Ms Jowell: I attended the meeting of the Health Council on 12 November in Brussels, on behalf of the United Kingdom.

The Council adopted its common position on the Commission's proposal for an injury prevention programme. The Council discussed the development of future public health policy and adopted conclusions which stressed the importance of better prioritisation and co-ordination of public health activities by the Community to complement action taken by the Member States. The Commission reported on progress in combating smoking within the Community and announced that it intended to propose measures on the tar and nicotine content of cigarettes and labelling of packets; it also intended to bring forward measures on smuggling, additives, and the prohibition of "light" and "mild" markings on cigarettes. Conclusions which stressed the need for a more focused approach were adopted on the European Union-United States Task Force. The Council agreed to continue to consider TSEs (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies) at each meeting and asked the Commission to provide it with a detailed annual report on the issue. The Council noted a progress report on the draft Recommendation on limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields. A response to the Commission's report on the revision of the homeopathic medicines Directives was also agreed. The Council welcomed the recommendations of the conference held in Copenhagen on 9–10 September 1998 on "The Microbial Threat". It also discussed co-operation between the European Union and the World Health Organisation. The International Therapeutic Solidarity Fund—a French Government initiative to provide anti-retroviral therapies to people with HIV/AIDS in developing countries—was also discussed. A discussion on the outcome of the conference on "Quality in Health Care" held by the Austrian Presidency on 24 July 1998 was held over lunch.

Training Support Programme

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources he will make available to the Training Support Programme (TSP, Specific Grant) for local authorities in the next three years. [60472]

Mr. Hutton: The training support programme budget for 1998–99 is £35.45 million. It is set to rise to £39.0 million for 1999–2000 and there are planning figures of £42.5 million and £44.5 million for the two subsequent years. This provides a sound basis on which local authorities can plan their local expenditure.

Joint Procedures (NHS and Personal Social Services)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 178, concerning National Priorities Guidance, what informal consultations were undertaken prior to its publication. [60297]

Mr. Hutton: The Government sought the personal advice and views of a range of key people from professional, National Health Service and social services organisations prior to the publication of *Modernising Health and Social Services: National Priorities Guidance 1999/00–2001/02*.

Continence Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current level of continence care provision. [60272]

Mr. Hutton: On 2 September 1998 we announced the details of the review of continence policy which involves representatives from the health service, social services and voluntary organisations. This review will lead to updated guidance which we plan to issue in Spring 1999.

Betaferon

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation his Department has made of the recently published research into the beneficial effects of Betaferon; and what plans he has to issue revised guidance. [60271]

Mr. Milburn: The Department has considered the results from the recently published research on treatment of multiple sclerosis with Betaferon (Beta-Interferon-1b). The research adds to the growing body of data about this medicine, but there are still many unanswered questions about its appropriate use in both relapsing-remitting and secondary progressive multiple sclerosis. The Department will be commissioning new research to address this. When the results of the research are available, we will issue revised guidelines which will take into account this and all other soundly based research evidence.

Fireworks

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated for injuries caused by fireworks in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [60265]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The DTI's annual census of firework injuries is conducted over a four week period taking in the run-up to 5 November and a few days afterwards. In the last ten years the number of people treated in Accident and Emergency departments in Great Britain during this period was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1987	960
1988	877
1989	800
1990	805
1991	723
1992	942
1993	1,058
1994	1,574
1995	1,530
1996	1,233
1997	908

No reliable estimates of injuries outside this period can be made because the numbers involved are too small to be extrapolated from data in the Home Accident Surveillance System.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59728]

Mr. Milburn: The Department has made provision for subsidised nursery places and an on-site holiday playscheme in London, and an on-site nursery and a holiday playscheme, funded jointly with the Benefits Agency, in Leeds. Childcare vouchers are available to staff in North and South Thames Regional Offices of the National Health Service Executive. The NHS Pensions Agency provides a subsidy towards the cost of a holiday playscheme for its staff. The Department also provides a range of family friendly policies including 16 weeks' paid maternity leave; extended career breaks (up to 5 years); 5 days' paternity leave; and other measures to help staff balance work and family life including jobshare, part-time working, homeworking and term-time only working.

The table shows the cost to parents of provision. Information on the use of facilities is not available in the form requested. The places available are set out in the table. The number of staff in post in the Department is 4,768.

A review of the Department's current childcare provision is underway.

DH: Childcare provision and cost to parents: 1996–97 and 1997–98

	Playscheme (cost to parent per child)	*Subsidised nursery (cost to parent per child)*	*Childcare vouchers (value of vouchers)*
London	24 place on-site holiday playscheme 5–12 years (£6 per day)	25 subsidised places (50% of costs of £105-£169)	
Leeds	40 place off-site holiday playscheme 5–14 years shared with Benefits Agency (£6.50 per day until 1/98, then £8.00 per day)	30 place on-site nursery shared with Benefits Agency (£84.45 per week)	
NHSPA	c.20 places taken up at off-site holiday playscheme (£5.50 per day)		
North Thames Regional Office			c.22 x £25 vouchers, for those in post at 1/4/96, one per family per week 0–5 years
South Thames Regional Office			As above

Notes:
1. The Department' staff in London also had access to the Westminster holiday playscheme. Around 4 parents took up places in each scheme.
2. During 1996–97 and part of 1997–98, the Department's staff had use of the Childcare Solutions telephone helpline. This provided information and advice on childcare in local areas free of charge and was used by 70 staff.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *33*, what assurances his Department has received from the Israeli Government that no new building permits will be issued for Jewish housing units in *(a)* Gaza and *(b)* the Occupied West Bank. [59559]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received no further assurances from the Israeli government that no new building permits will be issued for Jewish housing units in Gaza and the West Bank. But the Israeli Cabinet endorsed the Wye River Memorandum on 12 November and we expect the Israeli government to abide by the letter and the spirit of the agreement, which prohibits either side from taking any steps to change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We have made it clear to Israel that we regard the initiation and encouragement of settlement activity as a violation of international law and an obstacle to peace,

and we recently informed them of our concern at the issuing of tenders for construction at Har Homa in East Jerusalem.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to Israel on the implementation of the Wye Accord. [60163]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written twice to the Israeli Prime Minister since the Wye Memorandum was signed in Washington on 23 October to congratulate him on this achievement, and to stress the importance of swift implementation. Our Ambassador in Tel Aviv has also been in touch with key political contacts in Israel to express our concern at the delays in implementation. We trust that, following Cabinet approval of the Wye agreement on 11 November, full implementation will begin in accordance with the timeline established at Wye.

Foreign Policy Centre

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the annual budget of the Foreign Policy Centre; what proportion is charged to public funds; and if he will list the source of private funding. [57585]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Policy Centre is an independent foreign policy institute. The Centre's annual budget and contributions are matters for the Foreign Policy Centre. None of the Foreign Policy Centre's budget is charged to public funds.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the proposed annual salary of the Director Designate of the Foreign Policy Centre. [57584]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Policy Centre is an independent foreign policy institute. The Director Designate's salary is a matter for the Foreign Policy Centre.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the advantages of the policy input available from the Foreign Policy Centre relative to that from *(a)* his Department's (i) Policy Board, (ii) Policy Planning Unit, (iii) Research Department, (iv) High Commissioners, Ambassadors and overseas missions and (v) London-based desk offices, *(b)* his special advisers, *(c)* the intelligence services, *(d)* other Government departments, *(e)* the Royal Institute of International Affairs and *(f)* other academic institutions for the study of international affairs. [57590]

Mr. Robin Cook: It is established practice for Foreign Office officials and Ministers to have contact with a wide range of policy institutes and NGOs and to consider their views when developing policy. These contacts occur at all levels of the Foreign Office and are an important and valued part of the policy making process. Policy institutes and NGOs contribute to a wider public debate which can also influence policy. The nature of these contacts means it is not possible to assess the influence of one particular policy institute in isolation from other institutes.

Russia

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussion he has had with EU member countries about reducing illegal currency transfers from Russia to western banking institutions. [59276]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* There have been frequent discussions of Russia's economic problems and how the EU might best assist Russia to overcome them at meetings of the General Affairs Council, most recently on 9 November. During these discussions co-operation with Russia in fighting organised crime, including financial crime, has been discussed.

Through its TACIS programme, the EU funds training for Russian banking staff to help them identify evidence of money laundering and take action to prevent it.

An existing EU money laundering directive requires member states to implement legal measures to prevent criminal funds from being laundered by their financial institutions.

Schengen Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public access there is to European Council documents pertaining to the discussions after the Amsterdam IGC on interpreting the treaty negotiations relating to the opt-in to the Schengen Agreement by opt-out states. [59807]

Ms Quin: Members of the public may apply for access to any Council document under the provisions of Council Decision 93/731/EC of 20 December 1993. Applications are considered on a case-by-case basis.

The two draft Decisions identifying and incorporating the Schengen acquis have been made available to Parliament.

EU Youth Forum

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the meeting by a Minister from his Department with the European Youth Forum on 14 June; [59799]

(2) what representations *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have received from the European Union Youth Forum as part of its EU-funded lobbying activities. [59992]

Ms Quin: My predecessor, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), met representatives from the European Youth Forum on 14 June 1998 in the margins of the Cardiff European Council. The EYF briefed him on the conclusions of a conference which they had held from 11 to 14 June in Cardiff, entitled 'Fighting for our Future'. A central theme of the conference was youth and employment.

People's Europe '98 Conference

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of speakers at People's Europe '98 *(a)* endorsed and *(b)* opposed closer European integration; and what measures he will take to ensure balance in future conferences. [60000]

Ms Quin: Decisions on speakers for the People's Europe '98 conference were the responsibility of the organisers. At the Government's suggestion the organisers sought to ensure that a wide range of speakers from across Europe were invited, representing diverse points of view.

Visa Applications

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for visit visas have been refused at the High Commission in Lagos; and what proportion of the total applications this represents, in each of the last four years, and in the current year to date. [60027]

Mr. Fatchett: The information requested by my hon. Friend is as follows:

British High Commission—Lagos

Year	*Number of non-settlement visas issued*	*Number of refusals*	*Refusals as percentage of total applications processed*
1998[1]	30,668	5,877	16.1
1997	27,101	8,681	24.2
1996	33,249	7,963	19.3
1995	23,787	8,165	25.6
1994	31,202	10,232	24.7

[1] 1998 figures are from January-September

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement; [60076]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [60078]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of departments' plans which have been published in the Library. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library and on the internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible for millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60077]

Mr. Fatchett: The year 2000 problems which have arisen in the FCO are non compliant hardware, software and operating systems in the following:

Office automation systems

Business-critical database applications

Telecommunications

Embedded systems.

All the above have been classed as high priority.

The Agency for which the FCO has responsibility had a problem with its telecommunication. This is being corrected.

Information on the FCO's progress in tackling these problems was given in the FCO's last quarterly update of its plan, which will be found in the Library. My right hon. Friend the President of the Council will announce the results of the next quarterly review shortly. The updated plan will be placed in the Library and on the internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60079]

Mr. Fatchett: The FCO plans to have all its business-critical IT and embedded systems compliant before the millennium either by correction or by replacement.

The greatest risk has been identified as the limited time available to replace systems around the world. Contingency plans have been drafted to ensure workarounds can be implemented wherever replacements cannot be accomplished in time.

As requested by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council, the FCO will have completed risk assessments, and will have initial year 2000 business continuity plans in place, by the end of January 1999.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to his oral statement of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 708, what evidence he received from *(a)* the CIA and *(b)* other sources, to support his statement that Saddam Hussein had imported specialist surgical equipment for cosmetic surgery on those around him; [60275]

(2) what evidence he received from *(a)* the CIA and *(b)* other sources to support the statement he made at his recent press conference that Saddam Hussein had imported surgical equipment for breast enlargement operations. [60276]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Iraqi Government have submitted Distribution Plans of goods to be supplied under the United Nations "Oil for Food" programme which include Silicone breast implants (sizes 4, 5, 6 and 7), a Liposuction machine (worth over 16,000 USD) and

a teeth whitening laser worth (126,000 USD). These ignore the fact that the purpose of the "Oil for Food" programme is to provide essential humanitarian goods to those who need them in Iraq. The UN would not of course approve these items at the expense of more pressing needs. Saddam Hussein's perverse priorities are to provide luxury goods for his cronies rather than food and medicine for suffering children.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response has been sent to the Russian Foreign Minister about his objections to military action against Iraq. [60161]

Mr. Fatchett: We have made clear our own position on the use of military force in the Security Council and in public statements. We have discussed Iraq regularly with the Russians, among others.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the objectives of a possible air attack on Iraq. [60162]

Mr. Fatchett: The ultimate aim of our policy, including any use of military force against Iraq, has always been the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

Burma

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to increase aid to the Karen refugees in Burma. [59551]

Mr. Fatchett: In recent years, the Government have channelled support for refugees on the Thai-Burma border primarily through the Burma Border Consortium. In 1998, the Department for International Development has provided over £250,000 for the Consortium. DfID is considering a request from the Consortium for further support in 1999.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to bring pressure to bear on the SPDC regime in Burma to implement a ceasefire and enter into political dialogue with the Karen people. [59552]

Mr. Fatchett: We are concerned at the political situation in Burma and the plight of the ethnic minorities. We consistently exert pressure on the regime to enter into substantive dialogue with the different parties concerned to reach a solution and an end to fighting. Our efforts include support for UN involvement and a recent strengthening of the EU Common Position.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what facilities exist on St. Helena for citizens to be able to have access to files relating to them. [59433]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* St. Helenians have no right of access to files relating to them such as criminal records, benefit payments and passport applications. Public Servants are subject to open appraisal but do not have right of access to their files.

If my hon. Friend has any specific concerns, I would invite him to raise this issue with this office directly.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Seals

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of each type of seal found in United Kingdom waters, the total weight of fish consumed by these animals each year and the weight of each prey species this represents; and of these prey species, which, and in what numbers, weights or quantities, are exploited by *(a)* commercial fisherman and *(b)* anglers. [59032]

Mr. Morley: 1997 estimates (1996 for Northern Ireland) indicate UK populations of some 115,000 grey seals and 50,000 common seals.

Based on 1985 diet data it is estimated that in 1997 232,000 tonnes of fish was consumed by grey seals and 55,000 tonnes of fish by common seals. The predominant prey species were sandeels, cod and whiting. A significant proportion of the fish taken by seals are likely to have been juveniles which, given their high rates of natural mortality, may not in any case have reached a size at which they would be available to either commercial fishermen or anglers.

Mink

Angela Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of recent reports of the use of carbon dioxide gas for the gassing of mink in fur farms; and if he will ban the use of such gas as a method of killing mink. [59085]

Mr. Morley: A recent article (Veterinary Record, 26 September) concluded that under experimental conditions mink detect high concentrations of carbon dioxide gas and avoid them when given the opportunity to express a preference. It suggests that alternative methods of killing may be preferable on welfare grounds, but acknowledges that the degree of aversion to other methods of killing has not been studied. The matter needs to be considered at the European Community level, as the permitted methods of killing which include carbon dioxide gas, are specified in EU regulations. We shall ensure that this new report is considered by the European Commission: however, the Government are in any case committed to banning the farming of animals for their fur.

Genetically Modified Food

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans the Government have to commission research into the direct and indirect effects of releasing genetically modified organisms into the open. [59224]

Mr. Rooker: In addition to studies currently underway or about to be commissioned, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to her on 12 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *316*. We recently announced that the Government will be carrying out farm-scale evaluations

of the first commercial plantings of genetically modified crops for ecological effects along with commercial plantings of conventional crops.

European Fund for Fisheries Enforcement

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much the United Kingdom has been awarded in 1998 to date from the European Fund for Fisheries Enforcement; and if he will list *(a)* the projects that will receive assistance, indicating the amount of grant (i) applied for and (ii) received, and *(b)* those projects that were put forward but not accepted. [59557]

Mr. Morley: Information about Community assistance towards fisheries enforcement expenditure awarded to the United Kingdom in 1998 to date under the provisions of Commission Decision 98/439/EC is set out in the tables.

Decisions on the eligibility of planned expenditure, the rate of Community financial contribution, and the conditions to which contributions may be subject are determined by the Commission in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 18 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3760/92.

Central Government Departments including Executive Agencies

Total number of projects on which grant aid has been awarded	*Total planned expenditure (£)*	*Total planned expenditure eligible for grant aid (£)*	*Total grant aid awarded (£)*
10	9,280,077	5,367,054	2,797,882

Total number of projects on which grant aid has not been awarded	*Total planned expenditure (£)*	*Total planned aexpenditure eligible for grant aid (£)*	*Total grant aid awarded (£)*
13	1,974,254	0	0

Local Authority Fisheries Committees

Total number of projects on which grant aid has been awarded	*Total planned expenditure (£)*	*Total planned expenditure eligible for grant aid (£)*	*Total grant aid awarded (£)*
7	9,700	9,700	4,850

Total number of projects on which grant aid has not been awarded	*Total planned expenditure (£)*	*Total planned expenditure eligible for grant aid (£)*	*Total grant aid awarded (£)*
19	2,389,391	0	0

Note:

Amounts based on ecu exchange rate applied by Commission at time grant awarded.

Sea Fisheries Committees

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what money has been allocated to each of the United Kingdom's sea fisheries committees for 1998–99. [59558]

Mr. Morley: Sea Fisheries Committees are committees of local government. They are funded by their constituent local authorities. No funds are provided directly by central Government.

The Statutory Instruments establishing each committee specify the proportionate contribution that each constituent local authority has agreed to make towards its committee's costs.

Meat (Hygiene and Inspection)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will publish comparisons of the extent to which the United Kingdom and other EU countries use *(a)* veterinary surgeons and *(b)* meat inspectors in the public health inspection of the meat slaughter process; [58449]

(2) if he will publish comparisons of the different qualifications for *(a)* meat inspectors and *(b)* veterinarians involved in meat inspection in Britain and other EU countries. [58450]

Mr. Nick Brown: Harmonised EC meat hygiene rules, which apply equally in all EU Member States, lay down detailed and specific requirements for the supervision of licensed abattoirs by official veterinarians (ie fully qualified veterinary surgeons). The rules also specify the duties and responsibilities of such official veterinarians, including in respect of ante mortem and post mortem veterinary inspections. Council Directive 78/1026/EEC provides for the mutual recognition of the qualifications of veterinarians applying in different EU Member States.

The meat hygiene rules also provide for official veterinarians to be assisted in the performance of certain, specified, tasks by 'auxiliaries' whose qualifications must comply with the minimum qualifications laid down. In Great Britain the role of such 'auxiliaries' is performed by MHS Meat Hygiene Inspectors. My Department has no information on the qualifications of 'auxiliaries' employed on meat hygiene work in other EU Member States.

Information obtained by my Department recently about the implementation in other Member States of the veterinary supervision requirements laid down in EC meat hygiene rules shows that supervision levels and frequencies vary between States as one would expect. It does not support the claim that supervision levels in Great Britain premises are significantly higher then in other member States. I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish comparisons of the proportion of farm gate prices for meat in the United Kingdom and other EU countries that results from meat inspection. [58451]

Mr. Nick Brown: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish comparisons of the quality and cost of meat hygiene standards across the EU. [58448]

Mr. Nick Brown: Information about the quality and costs of enforcing meat hygiene standards in Great Britain is set out in the Annual Report and Accounts of the Meat Hygiene Service.

It is the European Commission's responsibility to ensure that Member States comply with their Community obligations as laid down in harmonised EC rules. The Commission's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) carries out regular programmes of inspection visits to all Member States. If necessary, the Commission will take infraction proceedings against those Member States whose arrangements are considered inadequate. Reports of FVO visits are published on the Commission's website on the Internet (http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/health/vi/reports) and a list of such reports will appear in MAFF's Meat Hygiene Enforcement Report and BSE Enforcement Bulletin, both of which are published monthly.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to review the impact of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 within one year of its implementation date. [58237]

Mr. Nick Brown: In common with all legislation, we will keep the impact of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 under review.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the differences between the methods of implementing the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 in different EU countries; [58239]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the cost to consumers of compliance with the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations in 1998 in each EU Member State; [58235]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the cost of compliance with the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 in each Member State of the EU. [58241]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 implement in Great Britain the provisions relating to charges for meat hygiene/welfare inspections of Council Directive 85/73/EEC (as amended) on the financing of veterinary inspections and controls.

The level, method of calculation and compliance costs of such charges in other EU countries are matters for the relevant competent authority in each Member State. It is the European Commission's responsibility to ensure that individual Member States comply with their Community obligations as laid down in Directive 85/73/EEC.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment his Department has made of the cost to British industry of the implementation of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998; [58240]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 on small and medium enterprises. [58232]

Mr. Nick Brown: A Regulatory Appraisal in respect of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 has been prepared by my Department and will be placed in the Library of the House. The Regulatory Appraisal includes an assessment of the likely compliance costs for business of the Regulations and the likely impact on small businesses.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received about the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 since they were implemented. [58233]

Mr. Nick Brown: My Department has received a small number of representations about the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 since they came into force.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the European Commission reasoned opinion document on which the interpretation of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 is based. [58238]

Mr. Nick Brown: No. The Reasoned Opinion is the formal legal document in which the European Commission has set out its case against the UK Government in respect of our failure to implement fully the veterinary supervision requirements laid down in EC meat hygiene rules. Such formal communications between the European Commission and Member State Governments are confidential and not for publication.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the effect on prices received by livestock farmers of the implementation of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998. [58242]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) Regulations 1998 relate to charges levied by the Meat Hygiene Service in Great Britain on licensed slaughterhouses, cutting plants and cold stores in respect of the hygiene/welfare inspections carried out in those premises. The prices received by livestock farmers for animals slaughtered in licensed slaughterhouses are a commercial matter for those involved.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60141]

Mr. Morley: The primary aim of the Ministry's millennium programme is to ensure that effective countermeasures are implemented to prevent any Year 2000 date-related problems from occurring. However, a formal risk management methodology has been introduced in core-MAFF and its Agencies which will identify the need for contingency plans where countermeasure action may not be fully effective.

Risk assessment will be completed and initial contingency plans will be in place by the end of January 1999; these will be fully developed by mid-1999, with key elements tested in the same timescale.

Non-departmental public bodies are being advised to progress contingency planning and their progress will be monitored.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement; [60140]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [60138]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government Departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of Departments' plans which have been published in the Library of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library of the House and on the Internet.

Rabbits and Rodents

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the annual economic loss sustained by the agricultural sector from the activities of *(a)* rabbits, *(b)* voles, *(c)* rats and *(d)* mice. [57923]

Mr. Morley: The damage caused by rabbits to agriculture is estimated at £40 million per annum. An assessment has not been made of the economic loss to agriculture caused by voles, rats and mice, but damage caused by small rodents can be considerable.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 18 November 1998

SCOTLAND

Teachers' Pay Settlements

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the pay settlements which have been reached for teaching staff in institutions of higher and further education in Scotland in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99. [56955]

Mrs. Liddell: Pay settlements for teaching staff in higher education institutions are set out in the table.

Percentage

	UCEA institutions	*CSCFC institutions*
1995–96	2.7	2.7
1996–97	2.9	2.9
1997–98	2.9	2.5
1998–99	[1]—	3.1

[1] 2 per cent. from 1 April and a further 1.8 per cent. from 1 October

The University and College Employers' Association (UCEA) negotiates pay on behalf of the universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews, Stirling and Strathclyde and Heriot-Watt University. The conference of Scottish Centrally Funded Colleges (CSCFC) negotiates pay for the remaining 11 Scottish higher education institutions.

Pay settlements in the further education sector in Scotland are the responsibility of individual college boards of management. Details of the terms and conditions of each college settlement are not held centrally.

Repossessions

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to enable the courts, in cases of repossession of houses, to intervene in order to determine what is in the best interests of the family resident in the house, and if they can continue to live there under an acceptable financial arrangement. [58811]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* There is nothing to stop a person with mortgage arrears offering to settle on terms acceptable to a creditor who is the holder of a standard security. However, should the creditor refuse the terms, the courts do not at present have any discretion about granting an order for ejection. I have no plans to change the law in this respect.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many houses or flats in Scotland have been repossessed by the mortgagee because of non-payment of mortgage in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [58812]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Data on the number of actual repossessions are not collected centrally. Figures in relation to the number of repossession orders granted by the courts have been collected by the courts since a revised system of collecting Civil Judicial Statistics was instituted on 1 January 1994. The figures from 1 January 1994 to 30 September 1998 are shown in the table. The figures for orders granted will however be higher than the number of repossessions completed.

Year	*Repossession orders granted*
1994	2,058
1995	3,554
1996	4,339
1997	4,305
1998 (to 30 September)	3,763

Protected Seabirds

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the distance from St. Kilda that the protected seabird populations of gannets, fulmars, puffins, Leach's petrels, Storm petrels and Manx shearwaters feed. [59375]

Mr. Macdonald: I am advised by Scottish Natural Heritage that most birds from St. Kilda feed within 55km of the islands during the breeding season. They range throughout the Atlantic at other times of the year.

Woodland Areas

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets he has set for increasing the proportion of woodland areas in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland by 2010. [60106]

Mr. Macdonald: We are committed to increasing the area of woodland in Britain, but we have not set any specific targets.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy regarding the sale of Forestry Commission woodlands. [59829]

Mr. Macdonald: As promised in our election manifesto, we have put an end to the large scale sales of Forestry Commission woodland. While the Commission will be able to buy and sell assets in order to manage its estate efficiently, any future woodland sales will be restricted to relatively small and isolated blocks of woodland which do not make a significant contribution to the Commission's objectives and are surplus to its requirements. Woodland which is important for public access will not be sold unless an access agreement is in place.

Student Maintenance Awards

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what proportion of those full-time new entrant students whose university or college tuition fees were paid for by the Student Awards agency for Scotland or its predecessor bodies received the maximum maintenance award in *(a)* 1968, *(b)* 1972, *(c)* 1977, *(d)* 1982, *(e)* 1987, *(f)* 1992 and *(g)* 1997; what would have been the figures for 1997 if all points of the residual

Income Scale for parental/spouse contributions had been increased by £10,000; and what would be the cost to public funds of such an increase. [60010]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The available information is set out in the tables.

For academic years prior to 1997–98 it is not possible to distinguish between new entrants and continuing students. The information provided in Table 1 is based on all award holders in the year in question. The figures for 1992–93 and later include award holders on full time Higher National Certificate courses, whereas those for earlier years do not. Data for 1968–69 are not readily available.

Table 2 sets out the available information on new entrant award holders in academic year 1997–98. It is based on provisional data which are subject to change.

It is not possible to calculate the effect of an increase in the residual income scale for parental/spouse contributions by £10,000 as no information is held on the income distribution of those families claiming fees only awards. An increase in the residual income scale would mean that some of these students would become entitled to an award.

Students receiving the maximum maintenance award

Year	*Number of award holders*	*Percentage of award holders*
1972–73	12,280	27
1977–78	14,940	28
1982–83	19,857	35
1987–88	21,204	36
1992–93	36,561	41
1996–97	47,417	43

New entrants in academic year 1997–98 receiving maximum maintenance awards

Number of new entrant award holders	*Number receiving full maintenance awards*
42,135	18,896 (45%)

Liquor Sales (Petrol Stations)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to alter the licensing laws to prevent or discourage petrol stations from selling liquor. [60354]

Mr. McLeish: There are no plans to amend the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 under which a licensing board may, subject to certain statutory criteria, grant petrol stations an off-sales licence.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60218]

Mr. Dewar: The Taskforce 2000 study is based on the most recent quarterly returns from Departments about their Year 2000 readiness. These have been available on the internet since early September. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of The Scottish Office's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Libraries of the House and published on the internet.

I am pleased that the report assesses Year 2000 readiness in The Scottish Office as a low risk. However we cannot afford to be complacent about the task of ensuring that there will be no material disruption to public and other vital services as a result of the millennium date change.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many unemployed people have been successful in obtaining jobs through the regional selective assistance programme, in each of the areas to which RSA applies. [59871]

Mr. Dewar: RSA is a scheme to increase or safeguard employment in the Assisted Areas throughout Great Britain. No figures are kept on how many of these jobs are filled directly from the unemployment register.

Under the pilot "RSA Priority" initiative, launched on 22 May 1998 in 5 particularly deprived areas of Scotland, 4 companies have to date been offered the opportunity to receive additional grant if they employ residents of these designated areas. The projects are at too early a stage to obtain any information on the individuals who will fill the new jobs to be created.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if the schedule of dates to fly the Union Flag has been made available to the Courthouse, Armagh City; if the Union Flag was flown at the Courthouse on Remembrance Sunday, and if he will make a statement. [59384]

Mr. Hoon: A schedule of dates to fly the Union Flag was made available to staff at the Courthouse, Armagh City. However, due to an oversight the flag was not flown on Remembrance Sunday (8 November). Arrangements have been put in place to avoid any recurrence of this unfortunate mistake.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60213]

Mr. Hoon: I regard the Year 2000 problem as an issue of the utmost seriousness and I take a close interest in the Department's programme. I welcome any independent assessment of progress. Although the Taskforce 2000 report contains some inaccuracies in its summary of the Department's current position, I am pleased to note its recognition of the overall competence with which the complex project is being managed.

The Department has recently submitted its latest quarterly return to the Central IT Unit and the results of that review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the return will be placed in the Library and published on the Internet.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Council if she will ensure that independent audits are undertaken of the plans and progress of each Government department and agency in dealing with the Year 2000 date change. [60208]

Mrs. Beckett: We have already encouraged Ministers to arrange for some form of quality assurance of their Departments' and agencies' Year 2000 programmes to be carried out. It is for individual Ministers to consider what approach to auditing best suits the needs of their Departments and agencies and what bodies they should use to undertake the audits.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Council how many civil servants are employed in the Year 2000 team in the Cabinet Office. [60310]

Mrs. Beckett: Ten.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Council if she will publish the Government's contingency plans for dealing with the consequences of system failure caused by the millennium bug. [60203]

Mrs. Beckett: I have asked all departments and agencies to have initial contingency plans in place by January 1999. I will consult colleagues about how much of the detail of the plans could sensibly be put into the public domain at that time.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Council what assessment she has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of her Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60216]

Mrs. Beckett: Work on ensuring the Millennium compliance of the Privy Council Office's systems is being taken forward as part of the Cabinet Office's Year 2000 Programme. The Cabinet Office has a comprehensive Year 2000 programme in place and is making good progress in tackling the problem. The Taskforce 2000 report therefore rightly noted that the Cabinet Office's programme posed little cause for concern.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Council on what date the Government's Year 2000 contingency unit was established; what its objectives are; and to which Minister it reports. [60204]

Mrs. Beckett: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the Year 2000 Team within the Cabinet Office. The Prime Minister announced the establishment of the Year 2000 Team in answer to a Parliamentary Question on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *374–75*.

The objective of the team is to support the work of Ministers in driving forward action in the public and private sector, including the national infrastructure, to prevent damage from the failure of electronic systems related to the Year 2000 date change.

The Year 2000 Team reports to me in my role as the Cabinet Minister responsible for the co-ordination of Government policy in response to the Millennium Bug.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what steps he has taken to improve energy efficiency in *(a)* heating and *(b)* lighting; and what plans he has to achieve further improvements in each of the next three years. [60152]

Sir Sydney Chapman: In the last three years we have spent more than £18,000 on energy conservation measures. The House has already achieved energy savings in excess of 15 per cent. and we expect to increase that saving to at least 20 per cent. when the project to modernise the main boilers in the Palace of Westminster is completed in August 2001.

TREASURY

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a break-down of the accounting and other adjustments line in Table B12 of the Pre-Budget Report. [59097]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The table provides a breakdown of the accounting and other adjustments shown in table B12 of the Pre-Budget Report, with accompanying brief explanatory notes.

Similar questions were answered on 22 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *585–86*, following the Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper. There have been a few changes to the presentation of the adjustments since then, reflecting the adoption of ESA95 in the national accounts which are explained in the Pre-Budget Report, paragraphs B26-B36.

Accounting and other adjustments in table B12 of the Pre-Budget Report

£ billion

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
1. Non-trading capital consumption	6.8	7.1	7.3	7.6	7.9
2. VAT refunds	4.9	5.0	5.2	5.5	5.8
3. EC contributions	–5.9	–6.7	–5.9	–5.8	–5.8
4. Income tax credits	2.9	2.0	2.8	6.2	6.7
5. Other spending in AME	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2

Accounting and other adjustments in table B12 of the Pre-Budget Report

£ billion

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
6. Adjustments for Public Corporations	2.9	3.3	3.7	4.0	4.4
7. Intra-public sector debt interest	–2.5	–2.3	–2.2	–2.1	–2.0
8. Financial transactions in DEL and AME	–0.1	–0.9	–1.2	–1.5	–1.7
9. Other accounting adjustments	0.3	0.1	–0.1	–0.1	–0.2
Total	9.2	7.8	9.9	13.9	15.1

Notes:

1. Adds the value of general government non-trading capital consumption, which is included in Total Managed Expenditure (TME).
2. Adds back VAT refunded to central government departments and local government. Departmental Expenditure Limits and Annually Managed Expenditure programme expenditure are measured net of these refunds, while Total Managed Expenditure is recorded including the VAT paid. Adds VAT refunded to NHS trusts, BBC and ITN in respect of contracted out services for non-business purposes, and adds VAT refunds to DIY housebuilders.
3. Deducts traditional own resources (ie payments of Customs duties and agricultural and sugar levies) and VAT contributions to the European Community, which are included in the net payments to EC institutions line in AME, but excluded from TME.
4. Adds income tax credits which score as public expenditure under national accounting conventions. Includes Mortgage Interest Relief, Life Assurance Premium Relief, and (from 1999–00) Working Families' Tax Credit and Disabled Persons' Tax Credit.
5. Includes the Valuation Office and Financial Services Authority.
6. Accounting adjustments to move to a national accounts basis for scoring public corporations' current and capital spending; adds capital expenditure and debt interest payments outside the public sector and removes capital grants from general government.
7. Removes intra-public sector debt interest and dividend payments and receipts which are included elsewhere in Departmental Expenditure Limits and Annually Managed Expenditure.
8. Deducts those financial transactions which are scored in Departmental Expenditure Limits and Annually Managed Expenditure.
9. Other adjustments include the deduction of grants paid to local authorities by non-departmental public bodies classified to the central government sector and the deduction of Bus Fuel Duty Rebate.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the policy of his Department on varying the cash plans of spending departments if inflation turns out to be significantly different from expected over the timescale covered by the Comprehensive Spending Review. [59421]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report published in June made it clear that cash plans of spending departments will be reviewed only if inflation varies substantially from forecast. In responding to the Treasury Committee report on the EFSR the Government said that they will not consider reviewing the cash figures other than in the event of inflation varying by more than 1.5 per cent. cumulatively from the projections in the Comprehensive Spending Review. There is, of course, no presumption that any review would lead to any changes in Departmental cash plans.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria he will use to assess the economic case for introducing the ten pence starting rate of income tax; and if he will make a statement. [59435]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* As the Chancellor made clear in his statement on the Pre-Budget Report on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 681–88, the Government will introduce a 10 pence starting rate of income tax when it is economically right to do so. The new rate will be incorporated in the income tax system in the way that best meets the Government's objectives of improving work incentives and promoting a fair and efficient tax system.

Tobacco and Alcohol Smuggling

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the use of tax stamps to combat the smuggling of tobacco and alcohol. [60178]

Dawn Primarolo: The use of tax stamps was considered as part of the Alcohol and Tobacco Fraud Review carried out by Customs in partnership with the trade. A report of the Review was published in July this year.

Pensions (Taxation)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to *(a)* tax pensions lump sums and *(b)* remove the higher rate tax benefit on private and occupational pensions. [59887]

Ms Hewitt: None.

Bit Tax (Internet Access)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of a bit tax on Internet access. [60260]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government see little merit in the idea of a bit tax on Internet use. Rather we support international efforts to ensure the proper and effective application of existing taxes to economic activity which is undertaken via the Internet.

Shipping Taxes

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *42*, if he will publish the costs to public

funds of introducing a tonnage-based tax on British shipping at rates comparable to those levied by other member states of the European Community, together with his estimate of the future trend in the yield from shipping taxes if the current tax regime is retained. [60097]

Dawn Primarolo: It would be disproportionately costly to produce a reliable estimate of the cost of introducing a tonnage tax for UK shipping. We do not produce separate forecasts of the tax yield from shipping companies.

Tax Credits

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and Peers and *(b)* members of the public regarding the proposed abolition of the ability of non-taxpayers to reclaim tax credits paid on investment income; and when he expects to announce his decision on whether non-taxpayers can continue to reclaim the tax credit from 6 April 1999. [60159]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have received a number of representations on this subject and we will make an announcement as soon as we are in a position to do so.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact on non-income tax payers of the abolition of tax credits on dividends from April 1999. [60358]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *37*.

VAT

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy towards the charging of VAT on building land; and if he will make a statement. [60166]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* The sale of building land is exempt from VAT unless the person selling it has made an election to tax the supply at 17.5 per cent. VAT.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the Arthur Anderson report on VAT on property; and if he will make a statement. [60167]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* The report by Arthur Anderson was released by the European Commission last month and it is still being analysed by Customs and Excise. It is too early to make any assessment of its content.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's proposed Public Service Agreements. [58928]

Mr. Byers: As was made clear at the time of the announcement of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review the Government place great importance on the public service agreements. The agreements will set out clear objectives, performance and efficiency targets for public services. They will be published next month.

Single European Currency

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response there has been from businesses to the Euro Preparation Unit's offer of free fact sheets to help small and medium businesses prepare for the launch of the euro. [60307]

Ms Hewitt: The Euro Preparation Unit's (EPU) business communication campaign on the euro, has proved highly effective in reaching its target audience of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The result of the EPU's direct mailing to 1.6 million SMEs was a response rate of over 10 per cent. This is around three times the industry norm. To date there have been requests for over 300,000 "business preparations for the euro" factsheet packs from businesses and key intermediary bodies.

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax consequences of EMU. [60622]

Ms Hewitt: In July the Government announced a consultation on the technical tax changes needed to prepare for the introduction of the single currency in other Member States. The consultation was based on some initial proposals which had been developed through earlier dialogue with market participants.

In the light of comments received on the consultation, draft regulations have now been drawn up and are being published today. Copies have been placed in the Library. The Government are thus ensuring that business has every opportunity to ensure that the changes that will be enacted will meet its needs.

Pensions Regulation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to modify the regulatory environment for pensions to encourage the private sector to make provision for low-cost, funded, second tier pensions; which of his Ministers is responsible for reviewing pensions regulation; and if he will make a statement. [59362]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* I have been asked to reply.

We are conducting a review into all aspects of pensions, including second tier pensions. One of the challenges for the review is to get the regulation of pensions right, so that people are confident their pensions are secure. We intend to publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visits

Q17. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to make an official visit to East Anglia. [58909]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans, but I hope to do so in the future.

Committee on Standards in Public Life

Helen Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the forthcoming vacancy on the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [60726]

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to announce that Professor Alice Brown has accepted my invitation to serve as a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life in succession to Professor Anthony King who stood down from the Committee at the end of October.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank Professor King for his valuable contribution to the work of the Committee over the past four years.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 18 November. [59870]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House today, I will have further such meetings later.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery (Seaside Towns)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the total value of National Lottery awards given to projects in seaside towns in each of the last three years and what proportion of the total this represents. [58781]

Mr. Banks: It is not possible to provide a breakdown of National Lottery awards in seaside towns in each of the last three years without incurring disproportionate costs. The Department's website www.lottery.culture.gov.uk. contains details of all awards made to date.

Royal Parks

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what consultation there has been with *(a)* local residents and *(b)* other members of the public by the Royal Parks Agency about its plan to extend parking charges to weekends and bank holidays in (i) Hyde Park and (ii) Regent's Park; [58863]

(2) if he will list the organisations which the Royal Parks Agency consulted this year about its plan to extend parking charges to weekends and bank holidays in Hyde Park and Regent's Park; [58864]

(3) if he will publish the submissions from the organisations consulted by the Royal Parks Agency about its plan to extend parking charges to weekends and bank holidays in Hyde Park and Regent's Park; [58862]

(4) to which other Royal Parks in London the Royal Parks Agency has plans to extend parking charges at weekends and bank holidays; [58865]

(5) how much extra revenue he estimates will be raised by the Royal Parks Agency by extending parking charges to weekends and bank holidays in *(a)* Hyde Park and *(b)* Regent's Park; and if he will make a statement on how this money is planned to be spent; [58867]

(6) what assessment the Royal Parks Agency has made of parking levels in (i) Hyde Park and (ii) Regent's Park at weekends and bank holidays; and if he will publish the figures upon which it based its assessment; [58866]

(7) if he will list the dates of all correspondence between his Department and the Royal Parks Agency about the extension of parking charges to weekends and bank holidays in (i) Hyde Park and (ii) Regent's Park; and if he will place copies of the correspondence in the Library. [58965]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Viviene Robertson to Mr. Richard Ottoway, dated 18 November 1998:

In the absence of the Chief Executive, David Welch, the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport has asked me to reply to your parliamentary questions about extending car parking charges in the Royal Parks to weekends and Bank Holidays.

40 Other Royal Parks in London to which it is planned to extend parking charges at weekends and Bank Holidays

The Agency is looking at the possibility of introducing car parking charges, including at weekends and Bank Holidays, in Richmond, Bushey and Greenwich Parks as part of a wider traffic management programme. It is in line with the recommendations of the Royal Parks Review Group and the Government's policy on traffic and parking in London. We will consult local authorities, local MPs and other interested parties on our proposals and take account of their views.

41 The dates of all correspondence between the Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Royal Parks Agency about the extension of parking charges at weekends and Bank Holidays in Hyde Park and Regent's Park

The Royal Parks Agency originally sought ministerial approval to extend the car parking charges in Hyde Park and Regent's Park on 11 March 1998. The Department responded on 31 May. After consulting interested parties, the Agency submitted a revised proposal on 10 June; the Department approved the proposal and gave permission on 14 July for amending regulations to be drawn up. On 17 September the Agency sought approval to lay the amending regulations before Parliament. On 20 October we wrote again to the Department to propose that the regulations should come into force on 1 February 1999. The Department agreed on 29 October.

I have arranged for copies of this correspondence to be placed in the Library.

42 Consultation the Agency has had with local residents and other members of the public

The Agency consulted local MPs, local interest groups, including the Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens and the Friends of Regent's Park, and the neighbouring local authorities as representatives of the public. The original proposals were revised as a result of their responses.

43 The extra revenue it is estimated will be raised by extending parking charges to weekends and Bank Holidays in Hyde Park and Regent's Park and how this money is planned to be spent

I cannot say how much additional revenue the new arrangements will raise but we anticipate it could be in the region of £100,000-£200,000. But it will depend on the weather and the take up and turnover of parking spaces. The 4 hour limit that applies during the week will not apply at weekends and Bank Holidays.

All income derived from car parking is retained by the Agency and goes towards the upkeep and maintenance of the Parks.

44 Publication of the submissions from the organisations consulted by the Royal Parks Agency about the plan to extend parking charges to weekends and Bank Holidays in Hyde Park and Regent's Park

The organisations consulted by the Royal Parks about the proposal to extend car parking charges to weekends and Bank Holidays were not advised at the time of consultation that their responses might be made public. It would be impracticable to seek permission from each of them to publish their submissions, but I have attached a list of those whom we consulted.

45 The assessment the Royal Parks Agency has made of parking levels in Hyde Park and Regent's Park at weekends and Bank Holidays, and the figures upon which the assessment is based

Our annual visitor surveys shows that less than 10% of visitors travel to Hyde Park and Regent's Park by car. It is our experience that car parking spaces are fully occupied, indeed over-subscribed at weekends, particularly when the weather is fine.

46 The organisations which the Royal Parks Agency consulted about its plan to extend parking charges to weekends and Bank Holidays in Hyde Park and Regent's Park

A list of the organisations consulted by the Royal Parks Agency is attached.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what duty the Royal Parks Agency has to consult local authorities when planning temporary road closures in the Royal Parks; [59778]

(2) if he will make it his practice to publish details of leases granted by the Royal Parks Agency to private companies of property in the Royal Parks. [59777]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from David Welch to Dr. Jenny Tonge, dated 18 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what duty the Royal Parks Agency has to consult local authorities about temporary road closures in the parks.

The Agency has no specific duty to consult local authorities over temporary road closures in the Royal Parks. However, the Royal Parks Agency consider themselves to be under an obligation, as good neighbours, to inform local authorities at an early stage of any closures that may be planned.

Letter from David Welch to Dr. Jenny Tonge, dated 18 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking him to publish details of leases granted by the Royal Parks Agency to private companies of property in the parks.

Details of these leases are commercial transactions and to publish this information would breach the companies' confidentiality, and compromise the Agency's ability to let property on commercial terms in future.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59740]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* For both *(a)* and *(b)*:

Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest;

Schedule of Ancient Monuments.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what childcare provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this childcare; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59717]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* As part of an overall Equal Opportunities Policy the provision of childcare facilities within my Department is two-fold: (i) one nursery place for a child aged between 2 and 5 years at the Stepping Stones Nursery, based at Napier Hall, Pimlico. Parents currently contribute 50 per cent. of the cost of the nursery place at a rate of £79.00 per week.

(ii) DCMS staff can also use places at the Westminster Holiday Playscheme which caters for children between 5 and 12 years old and which operates during all the main school holidays at various locations in Whitehall and Victoria. Parents currently contribute 50 per cent. of the cost of the playscheme at a rate of £8.40 per day.

Four parents used the childcare facilities in each of the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98. The proportion of total staff was 1.1 per cent.

My Department is committed to developing its family friendly policies further. Childcare is only one element. Measures already in place to help staff to balance work and family life include: part time working, jobshare, flexi-time, homeworking, paid maternity, paternity and adoption leave, career breaks and special leave for domestic purposes.

Youth Football Development Programme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) which Football League clubs have applied for lottery money from the Sports Council of England for youth development schemes; [59939]

(2) how many applications have been received by the Sports Council of England from Football League clubs for funding for youth development schemes; [59938]

(3) which Football League clubs have unsuccessfully applied for lottery money from the Sports Council of England to fund youth development schemes; [59942]

(4) which Football League clubs have successfully applied for lottery money from the Sports Council of England to fund youth development schemes; [59941]

(5) which Football League clubs have received lottery money from the Sports Council of England to fund youth development schemes. [59940]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* Sixty-nine Football League clubs are eligible for Lottery money under the Youth Football Development Programme, which is jointly funded by the FA Premier League and the Lottery Sports Fund. So far thirty one clubs have been awarded Lottery funding from the English Sports Council; fourteen clubs' applications are under assessment by the ESC; and three applications have been returned with a request for further information No clubs have been turned down for funding under this scheme. The table sets out the awards that have been made to date.

FAPL/ESC Youth Football Development Programme

£

Club	*Total project costs (1st year)*	*Lottery Sports Fund (1st year)*	*Lottery Sports Fund (4 years total)*
Barnet	195,773	69,000	276,000
Brighton & Hove Albion	167,700	69,000	276,000
Bristol City	374,000	69,000	276,000
Bury	285,958	69,000	276,000
Chesterfield	259,817	69,000	276,000
Colchester United	171,050	69,000	276,000
Crewe Alexandra	301,731	69,000	276,000
Fulham	548,548	69,000	276,000
Huddersfield Town	200,361	100,181	400,722
Ipswich Town	686,204	69,000	276,000
Leyton Orient	200,318	69,000	276,000
Lincoln City	213,035	69,000	276,000
Manchester City	870,034	69,000	276,000
Millwall	394,000	69,000	276,000
Northampton Town	286,831	69,000	276,000
Norwich City	288,000	69,000	276,000
Notts County	226,154	69,000	276,000
Oldham Athletic	284,751	69,000	276,000
Oxford United	234,362	57,551	230,204
Peterborough United	737,199	69,000	276,000
QPR	812,080	69,000	276,000
Reading	219,673	69,000	276,000
Rotherham United	221,961	69,000	276,000
Sheffield United	219,703	48,372	193,488
Shrewsbury Town	182,704	58,834	235,336
Stoke City	266,348	69,000	276,000
Sunderland	540,892	69,000	276,000
Walsall	225,946	69,000	276,000
Watford	359,000	69,000	276,000
West Bromwich Albion	307,605	69,000	276,000
Wycombe Wanderers	185,075	69,000	276,000
Grand Total	10,466,773	2,127,938	8,511,750

BBC

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what are the requirements placed on the BBC to advertise senior executive appointments externally. [59937]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* Under the terms of the Royal Charter and the Government's Agreement with the BBC, the BBC Governors are responsible for appointing the Director General and other senior members of staff. It is for the Governors to determine whether or not to advertise such posts externally.

Royal Observatory, Greenwich

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are for exhibitions in the buildings of the former Royal Observatory, Greenwich, during and after the millennium celebrations. [60103]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Royal Observatory, Greenwich, has been a Museum, run as part of the National Maritime Museum, for the past forty years and there has been no recent change in status in this regard. Decisions on exhibitions at the Observatory are a matter for the National Maritime Museum Trustees and, given that the Observatory was extensively refurbished and updated in 1993, there are no plans for new displays during the Millennium year. The Museum will however be mounting a major exhibition on The Story of Time (exploring the changes and developments in the concepts of time throughout the ages across a number of different cultures) in the Queen's House, Greenwich.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement; [60128]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [60126]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government Departments' and Agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector including the BBC. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of Departments' plans which have been published in the Libraries of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Libraries of the House and on the internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60129]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* My Department is in the process of drawing up contingency plans in the event of problems arising from the millennium bug. My Permanent Secretary is in touch with all our sponsored bodies, both agencies and other public bodies, about this matter.

An assessment of all the embedded systems in DCMS' buildings has been undertaken. Only one system has been found to be non-complaint and that has been replaced with an updated Year 2000 compliant system.

All DCMS sponsored bodies have given assurances that this matter is incorporated in their Year 2000 compliance work.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60127]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* My Department has completed over 75 per cent. of its Year 2000 compliance work. To date, no significant problems have been found. An assessment of all the embedded systems in DCMS' buildings has been undertaken. Only one system has been found to be non-compliant and that has been replaced with an updated Year 2000 compliant system.

Problems arising in DCMS' sponsored bodies compliance work are not collated centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. However, quarterly progress statements supplied by our sponsored bodies can be found on DCMS' website (www.culture.gov.uk).

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60221]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have noted the Taskforce 2000 report. My Department expects to be fully Year 2000 compliant by March 1999. The compliance programme has also been audited by my Department's internal auditors.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of DCMS' latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library and published on the Internet.

CABINET OFFICE

Better Government

11. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what consultations he is undertaking on the proposed better government White Paper. [58923]

12. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office for what reasons the White Paper on better government has been delayed. [58924]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: As I explained to the House on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1267–68, the Government will publish a White Paper in the spring, setting out proposals for modernising government and joining up public services, to secure effective decision-making and services that work and respond to the people who need them. The Prime Minister has asked me to chair a Cabinet Committee to drive this agenda forward and the timetable remains firmly on course. I am keen to take into account a wide range of views and ideas in preparing the White Paper.

13. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the progress of the better government for older people pilot projects. [58925]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Better Government for Older People programme is a flagship project for joined-up Government. The 28 local pilots are developing an ambitious range of projects to improve the quality of public services for older people. We are also setting up a Learning Network to make sure many more authorities across the UK are able to share learning and experience with the pilots.

As the number of older people in our society continues to rise, we will need increasingly to value and celebrate them for the experience they bring and the positive contribution they can make. This programme is a step in that direction and will make a real difference to the lives of older people as we enter the new Millennium.

Government Information Service

14. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the role of the Government Information Service. [58926]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The role of the Government Information and Communication Service is to communicate information about the policies and actions of the Government of the day. It does so through the media and through paid publicity campaigns, conducted in an economic and appropriate way, having regard to the need to be able to justify the costs as expenditure of public funds.

Policy Co-ordination

15. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent discussions he has had with hon. Members on the mechanisms for the co-ordination of Government policy. [58929]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: My role is to assist the Prime Minister and Ministerial colleagues in the implementation and co-ordination of Government policy and its effective

presentation. The Government are interested in obtaining a wide range of views, and those of hon. Members are an important part of this process.

New Technology

16. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to use new technology to improve communication between Government and citizens. [58930]

Mr. Kilfoyle: A new strategic framework for electronic government services will be set out in the proposed White Paper on Better Government.

Ministerial Visits

17. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to visit Wales in the course of his duties. [58931]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I have no plans to visit Wales in the near future.

Genetically Modified Organisms

18. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the delivery across departments of Government policy relating to genetically modified organisms. [58932]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government recognise the potential benefits offered by developments in biotechnology, but also the environmental and human safety issues which these raise.

The new Ministerial Group on Biotechnology and Genetic Modification, which the Prime Minister has asked me to chair, will review our policies in this field and how they are delivered.

People's Panel

19. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what use he will make of the first results from the people's panel in the development of public services. [58933]

Mr. Kilfoyle: We intend to use the results from the People's Panel to inform our decision-making on improving public services. The Panel is an important part of our drive to modernise Government and make public services more responsive to users.

Deregulation

20. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what further changes he proposes to make in the deregulation process following the publication of the better regulation guide. [58935]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Following the publication of the Better Regulation Guide, the Government are establishing systems to monitor new regulatory proposals, as well as training and arrangements for regulatory reporting, in order to promote the better regulation process.

The Guide does not affect availability or use of the Deregulation order making process and we will continue to put forward draft orders for consideration by the House of Commons Deregulation Committee and the Delegated Powers and Deregulation Committee of the House of Lords. The Government are also looking at the scope for reform of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Public Servants

21. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what arrangements he is making in connection with public servants whose contracts have expired to avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest arising from their subsequent employment by the private sector. [58936]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Civil servants are bound by the business appointment rules, which govern the acceptance of offers of employment on leaving Crown service. The terms and conditions of service of other public servants are a matter for the relevant appointing authorities.

Drugs Misuse

22. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to inform hon. Members of the problems created by drug misuse in the United Kingdom. [58937]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator will present to me in the spring his first Annual Report and Plan of Action against Drug Misuse. This will include a progress report on the strategy *Tackling Drugs To Build a Better Britain* which was launched in April. His findings and priorities for action will be made available in the Library.

23. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on progress in the Government's anti-drug strategy following the appointment of the anti-drugs co-ordinator. [58938]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government's anti-drugs strategy *Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain* published in April this year established a framework for action over the next 10 years. The long term targets are to reduce drug misuse by young people, to reduce drug-related crime, to increase participation in drug treatment and to reduce the availability of drugs. Specific short and medium term targets will be in place by March 1999. Locally, Drug Action Teams are now drawing up action plans for 1999–2000. The UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator will assess progress and report annually to Government starting in March 1999.

In September 1998, following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government announced £217 million additional funding over the next 3 years for anti-drugs activities.

25. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he is taking to ensure greater action against drugs by public authorities acting at community level. [58940]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: Drug Action Teams are responsible for co-ordinating action against drugs at local level. They are drawing up local action plans to meet the objectives in the anti-drugs strategy *Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain* which are required to be with the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator by 31 December. The

Government will provide £15 million over the next three years to support Drug Action Teams in their Co-ordination function, an increase of £1.5 million per annum.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what additional measures have been put in place to assist pro-active drug enforcement measures at points of entry; and if he will make a statement. [58854]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: Customs together with other relevant enforcement agencies are currently reviewing their drugs enforcement policies and operational priorities in the light of the aims and objectives outlined in the Government's anti-drugs strategy *Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain* launched in April 1998. The UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator will be taking account of departments' forward plans in presenting his Annual Report and Plan of Action against drugs to Government.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what level of funding is to be made available in 1998–99 on prevention and treatment services for drug misuse; and how much is planned to be spent on these services in each of the next three years; [58868]

(2) what proportion of the extra resources for the drug misuse budget are designated for *(a)* drug rehabilitation programmes, *(b)* education programmes, *(c)* treatment in long-stay centres and *(d)* prisons programmes. [58869]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review on drugs found that in 1997–98, of the £1.4 billion total estimated expenditure on anti-drugs activities, 12 per cent. was spent on prevention (including education) and 13 per cent. was spent on treatment and rehabilitation. Similar levels of expenditure are expected in 1998–99. Additional funding available for three years from 1999–2000 is outlined in the table.

£ million

Additional funding	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*	*2001–2002*
PSS (purchase of community care services)	3	5	12.5
NHS: Health Authorities drug misuse special allocation	12	18	20
Comprehensive provision for treatment of problem drug users in prison and effective links between prisons and community	20	20	20
Voluntary Drug Testing in prison	2	5	5
Piloting of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders followed by comprehensive implementation subject to evaluation	1	20	40
Education and Prevention	1	1	1

Note:
£10.5 million of the total £217 million and not shown in the table is for research and support for local co-ordination for Drug Action Teams

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what strategies have been put in place since 15 October 1997 to support local projects involving *(a)* police, *(b)* local government, *(c)* schools and *(d)* businesses aimed at curbing the activities of dealers in illegal drugs; [58857]

(2) what additional measures have been put in place since the appointment of the Government's Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator to combat the *(a)* importation, *(b)* trade in and *(c)* use of illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement. [58858]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government's anti-drugs strategy "Tackling Drugs Together to Build a Better Britain" published in April this year established a framework for action over the next 10 years. The priorities in 1998–99 relate to developing the Key Performance Indicators which will measure progress in future years against the objectives outlined in the strategy. Drug Action Teams are undertaking work which will form the basis for action in 1999–2000 and following years to implement the strategy at a local level.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of the extra resources for the drug misuse budget is made up of assets seized from drug dealers following conviction for drugs trafficking. [58851]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: In the White Paper "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain", we announced that a proportion of assets seized from drug traffickers will be channelled back into anti-drugs programmes. Officials in the Cabinet Office, the Treasury, the Home Office and other relevant departments are presently considering how this can best be achieved. The Government expect to make an announcement later this year about the amount available for the financial year 1999–2000, and the criteria on which it is to be distributed.

The additional resources of £217 million made available under the Comprehensive Spending Review do not include assets recovered from drug traffickers.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many programmes to educate young people in the dangers of illegal drugs have been initiated since 15 October 1997. [58856]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government have continued to support a range of existing drug education programmes through, for example, the Department of Health's contract with the Health Education Authority, the Department for Education and Employment's Standards Fund and the Home Office Drugs Prevention initiative.

The Government published their 10 year anti-drugs strategy in April following a review of all action to tackle drug misuse by the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator. Education is an essential part, and all future anti-drugs activity and expenditure by the Government are being developed in accordance with this strategy. A total of £19.5 million per year will help to support the development of effective programmes across the country.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what additional measures have been put in place to bring about a reduction in the international supply of illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement. [58852]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: Reducing the availability of illegal drugs on our streets is one of the key objectives of the Government's strategy for tackling drugs misuse.

International effort aims to reduce the flow of illegal drugs to the UK by reducing production of illegal drugs, improving the effectiveness of efforts to control the trade in illegal drugs and the chemical precursors used in their manufacture, and targeting drugs profits through effective international action against money laundering.

Resources are targeted at the key producer and transit countries for drugs reaching the UK: in particular the Caribbean, Latin America, South West and Central Asia, and South Eastern Europe.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the increase in drug misuse in rural areas. [59765]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government take seriously any report that indicates drug misuse problems in rural communities. Accordingly, the Home Office Drugs Prevention Initiative has commissioned further research to inform drug prevention action in rural areas.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) if his Department will allocate funds specifically for tackling drug misuse in rural areas; [59766]

(2) what consideration will be given to the particular circumstances of rural communities in the implementation of the cross-departmental review of illegal drugs. [59764]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The UK Anti-Drugs strategy launched in April seeks to address the needs of both rural and urban communities. In September, I announced substantial additional funding of £217 million over the next three years, following the Drugs Comprehensive Spending Review to deal specifically with drug misuse issues. Drug Action Teams are responsible for tackling drug misuse locally and must determine local needs and spending priorities.

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what further support is planned for the work of the drug action teams following the provision of extra resources within the Comprehensive Spending Review. [58982]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: Of the £217 million additional funding for anti-drugs activities provided as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review, £1.5 million over three years is to support the local coordination function of Drug Action Teams. The total central government support for local co-ordination by Drug Action Teams will be £15 million during the financial years 1999 to 2002. The Government are considering the views of Drug Action Teams on the allocation of this funding. Decisions will be announced later this month.

Government Publications (Disabled People)

24. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what step he is taking to ensure disabled access to Government publications. [58939]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Central Office of Information (COI) provides a number of services to government departments to assist them in ensuring that their information material is accessible to people with disabilities. The COI's Informability Unit offers advice and consultancy on accessible information issues and also procurement of accessible formats. The Unit has published The Informability Manual, which is widely used throughout government departments and the private sector as a good-practice guide to making information accessible.

The COI also produces two magazine services, one on audio cassette (Sound Advice), the other on British Sign Language and subtitling on video (Public Scene). These magazines are available to government departments and agencies to publicise details of current publications and campaigns to sensory impaired audiences. Both services are supplied free to organisations which relate to people with disabilities or literacy problems and act as disseminators of the information to their particular audiences.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60217]

Mr. Kilfoyle: For the purpose of this answer, the Prime Minister's Office is part of the Cabinet Office.

The Taskforce 2000 report has rightly noted that no insurmountable problems are expected for the Cabinet Office and its agencies on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. Detailed comments on Taskforce 2000's observations are as follows:

Some non-critical systems have been rescheduled in the Cabinet Office central department but remain on target for completion by the second quarter of 1999. These systems are being replaced as part of the planned implementation of, and within the planned expenditure for, the Department's IT strategy.

The Buying Agency's schedule is to have in place compliant versions of all business critical systems by 31 March 1999 and to stay within planned expenditure. Non critical systems are expected to be tested by the end of September 1999. Business continuity plans and end-to-end business process testing will be in place by January 1999.

The Property Advisers to the Civil Estate's programme to make compliant business critical areas is well advanced. The slower programme to ensure compliance for non-critical areas, such as vacant surplus property, is also fully on schedule and will be completed by September 1999. This is consistent with the Agency's own advice to Government Departments issued in June 1997.

The role of the Civil Service College is to help develop managerial and professional skills and promote best practice throughout Government in both management and key professional areas. It does not offer technical IT training courses. Nevertheless, it does and will continue to include Year 2000 issues in Systems Management and Project Management courses where appropriate. The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (the relevant Cabinet Office Agency) offers a wide range of advice and guidance on Year 2000 issues to the public sector.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the Cabinet Office's latest quarterly return will be placed in the library of the House and published on the Internet.

HOME DEPARTMENT

House-to-house Collections

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given to local authorities and the police regarding the operation of the House to House Collections Act 1939, with particular reference to soliciting householders for goods which they believe are for UK-based charity shops but which are exported for commercial gain. [59889]

Mr. Boateng: Officials met representatives from the Charity Shops Group recently to discuss some of the problems identified in this area. Consideration is being given to whether there is a need for guidance to be given to the relevant authorities.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that Part III of the Charities Act 1992 is being enforced to control house to house collections. [59888]

Mr. Boateng: Part III of the Charities Act 1992 has not yet been brought into force. I hope soon to be in a position to announce proposals for taking this matter forward.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason category A prisoners in Belmarsh prison are required to leave defence papers in their cell during a search. [60014]

Mr. George Howarth: Section 17.73 of the Prison Service Security Manual, a copy of which is in the Library, stipulates that, during a cell search, staff must examine legal correspondence thoroughly, in the absence of the prisoner, so far as is necessary to ensure that it is bona fide correspondence between the prisoner and a legal adviser and does not conceal anything else. This applies to all prisoners in all closed prisons.

When searching cells, it is essential that prison officers search all items in the prisoner's possession. If legal documents are not searched there is a risk of other documents and small items, such as blades or drugs, being concealed.

This policy has been tested in the Court of Appeal and I am satisfied that it is within the law.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers, claiming Kosovan origin are currently detained at *(a)* Campsfield House and *(b)* other immigration detention centres. [60013]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Regrettably, information on the number of detained asylum seekers who claim to be Kosovan can be obtained only by examining individual case records and is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

As there is no distinct nationality of Kosovan, those claiming to be Kosovan are usually to be found among nationals of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Some claiming to be Kosovan are in fact Albanian.

The number of each of these nationalities held in the five main centres on 17 November 1998 was:

	FRY	*Albania*
Campsfield House	8	15
Tinsley House	6	8
Harmondsworth	4	4
Haslar	4	9
Rochester	23	23
Total	45	59

These data include those detained under Immigration Act powers, whether or not they have claimed asylum at any time.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Kosovans *(a)* have applied for asylum, *(b)* have had an initial decision on their application, *(c)* are appealing against asylum decisions and *(d)* have been granted asylum or exceptional leave to remain in each of the last 24 months; and what formal or informal procedures are used to identify Kosovans. [60344]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information is on asylum applications and decisions for nationals of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and is given in the table. Although Kosovans are not separately identifiable, the vast majority of applicants from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia claim to be ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. I regret that there is no information available regarding nationals of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia appealing against asylum decisions.

The determination of whether an applicant is an ethnic Albanian from Kosovo in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as claimed, is based on the information and evidence available in the individual case, including any documentation submitted and the outcome of any interview conducted. There is evidence that some of those claiming to be Kosovan are in fact from Albania.

Asylum applications[1] received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, and initial decisions on applications, November 1996 to October 1998, for nationals of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia[2]

Principal applicants

	Applications			*Decisions*			
	Total	*Port*	*In country*	*Total decisions*	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Total refusals*
1996							
November	50	30	20	35	—	5	35
December	55	35	20	65	55	5	5

Asylum applications[1] received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, and initial decisions on applications, November 1996 to October 1998, for nationals of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia[2]

Principal applicants

	Applications			Decisions			
	Total	*Port*	*In country*	*Total decisions*	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Total refusals*
1997							
January	70	40	30	85	75	*	10
February	105	75	25	155	150	*	5
March	50	40	10	165	160	*	5
April	115	90	25	140	140	*	*
May	95	60	35	100	95	*	5
June	110	65	50	130	90	40	—
July	150	75	75	135	100	35	*
August	200	105	95	140	100	45	*
September	220	170	50	160	120	40	—
October	240	145	95	190	145	40	*
November	220	165	55	85	85	*	—
December	295	230	65	100	95	5	*
1998							
January	270	185	90	125	120	*	*
February	270	175	100	105	95	*	10
March	280	185	95	115	100	15	*
April	385	240	145	125	100	20	5
May	315	180	135	130	120	10	*
June	680	290	390	120	110	5	5
July	845	225	620	80	50	20	10
August	905	335	575	60	50	—	10
September	870	300	570	70	40	—	30
October	1,160	250	905	90	55	—	35
Total	7,955	3,685	4,270	2,715	2,255	290	170

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2
[2] The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia consists of Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro

Cannabis

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long the programme of testing and evaluation he requires before cannabis can be made available on prescription will take; and what procedures will have to be gone through. [60104]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government's view is that cannabis should not be available on prescription unless or until the safety, quality and efficacy of a medicinal form have been scientifically established and a marketing authorisation issued by the Medicines Control Agency. In order to satisfy those requirements, I understand from the Medicines Control Agency that a product based on cannabis would have to go through carefully designed clinical trials, a procedure which all prospective new medicines have to complete. How long such procedures would take would depend on precisely how the trials were undertaken and the results which began to emerge during them.

Fines

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what, in each of the last five years, was the average level of fine issued in respect of each category of crime for which fines are used; and if he will make a statement. [60343]

Mr. Boateng: The information is given in the table.

The fine remains the most commonly used disposal of the courts and, as the figures in the table show, there has been an 11 per cent. increase in the level of fines over the five year period between 1993 and 1997.

Average fine at all courts by offence group 1993–97[1]
England and Wales

£

	Average fine				
Offence group	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*[2]1997*
Indictable offences					
Violence against the person[1]	183	170	174	169	171
Sexual offences	221	205	210	308	220
Burglary	110	145	140	138	143
Robbery	93	108	63	105	79
Theft and handling stolen goods	86	114	112	107	106
Fraud and forgery	148	192	174	227	176
Criminal damage	90	102	103	109	110
Drug offences	89	101	101	103	101
Indictable motoring	150	165	176	174	175
Other non-motoring offences	244	228	263	372	413
Summary non-motoring offences	102	98	103	103	104
Summary motoring offences	149	160	166	161	163
All offences	131	137	145	141	146

[1] Excluding the offence of murder which carries a mandatory "life" sentence.
[2] Provisional

Young Offenders

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time was from arrest to sentencing for young offenders in the latest period for which figures are available; by what date he expects to meet his target to halve the time from arrest to sentencing for persistent young offenders; what the definition is of persistent offending; and if he will make a statement. [60345]

Mr. Boateng: Information about the average time for arrest to sentence for young offenders has not been collected nationally in the past. New arrangements to do so were trialled earlier this year and put in place nationally in October. In addition, we have undertaken two special exercises to monitor the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders, reflecting our commitment to halve the average time from arrest to sentence for this group. In 1996, the average time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders was 142 days. In 1997, it was 141 days overall and 138 days between May and December 1997.

A persistent young offender is defined as a young person who has been sentenced on three or more separate occasions by any criminal court in the United Kingdom for one or more recordable offences, and within three years of the last sentencing occasion is subsequently arrested or has information laid against him for a further recordable offence.

The Government are taking a range of actions to help local agencies achieve quickly the target of a national average of 71 days from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders. We have asked all youth courts to set up fast tracking schemes for persistent young offenders. In the last 12 months, the number of fast track schemes has grown from 12 to 160 in operation or planned in England and Wales. The scheme for all young offenders in North Hampshire has shown what can be achieved by cutting the average time taken to deal with young offenders from charge to sentence from 133 days to 89 days.

From October, we have set demanding performance targets for all stages of proceedings up to and after trial and for all youth justice agencies. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 includes provisions to help courts to manage cases more quickly and effectively. Several measures, based on recommendations in the Narey review, are currently being piloted, with national implementation planned for October next year. The Act will also enable statutory time limits to be set in cases involving young offenders and persistent young offenders.

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the proposals for a new disposal for young offenders, contained in Chapter 9 of the White Paper "No More Excuses" will be taken forward. [60672]

Mr. Straw: The White Paper "No More Excuses" set out radical proposals for reform of the youth court, to enable those appearing before the youth court for the first time to be referred, by way of sentence, to a youth offender panel. Following the principles of restorative justice, the panel would draw up a contract with the young offender to include reparation to the victim of the offence, or to the wider community, and measures to deal with drug or alcohol abuse, poor parenting, or other issues relevant to the offending behaviour. The length of the referral would be determined by the court on the basis of the seriousness of the crime, up to a maximum of 12 months. The Government invited comments on these proposals, and received replies from 97 individuals and organisations. The majority of the respondents were in favour of the proposals.

As suggested in the White Paper, it is intended that the new disposal will be automatic for those appearing for the first time and pleading guilty, save for those occasions where either an absolute discharge or a custodial sentence is considered appropriate. In the light of consultation, it is also proposed to make the disposal available, on a discretionary basis, where the defendant pleads guilty to some offences but not guilty to others; and to give the courts discretion to extend existing referral orders when dealing with other offences committed before or during the referral period. The White Paper suggested that membership of the youth offender panel be drawn from the magistracy and the police. In the light of consultation, it is proposed that panel members be recruited from members of the community with an experience of young people and crime. This would include magistrates and the police, but on a lay basis.

Subject to these and other minor amendments to the original White Paper proposals, legislation making provision for this new disposal will be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Police Budgets

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have budgets set for 1999–2000 which are (i) a real terms rise in funding, (ii) fixed in real terms and (iii) a real terms fall in funding; and if he will make a statement. [60339]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not yet available. The provisional police funding settlement for 1999–2000 will be announced in the next few weeks. Police authorities will set their budgets following approval by the House, in late January or early February, of my right hon. Friend's determination of the amount of grant he proposes to pay to each police authority, and the Metropolitan Police, next year.

Police Manpower

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers *(a)* were recruited, *(b)* retired, *(c)* were dismissed and *(d)* resigned, (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage, per police force in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [60342]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Recruitment and wastage figures—police forces in England and Wales—1997–98

Forces	*Total police strength*	*Recruits*	*% of total strength*	*Dismissals*	*% of total strength*	*Voluntary resignations*	*% of total strength*
Avon and Somerset	2,975.85	105	3.5	2	0.1	18	0.6
Bedfordshire	1,079.20	46	4.3	1	0.1	14	1.3
Cambridgeshire	1,291.18	58	4.5	0	0.0	8	0.6
Cheshire	2,041.92	87	4.3	0	0.0	20	1.0
City of London	824.90	29	3.5	0	0.0	16	1.9
Cleveland	1,483.43	56	3.8	4	0.3	4	0.3

Recruitment and wastage figures—police forces in England and Wales—1997–98

Forces	*Total police strength*	*Recruits*	*% of total strength*	*Dismissals*	*% of total strength*	*Voluntary resignations*	*% of total strength*
Cumbria	1,163.50	46	4.0	0	0.0	7	0.6
Derbyshire	1,772.10	61	3.4	1	0.1	7	0.4
Devon and Cornwall	2,961.50	172	5.8	9	0.3	4	0.1
Dorset	1,310.00	75	5.7	1	0.1	8	0.6
Durham	1,514.78	105	6.9	2	0.1	6	0.4
Dyfed-Powys	1,002.30	33	3.3	0	0.0	4	0.4
Essex	2,928.48	108	3.7	7	0.2	19	0.6
Gloucestershire	1,103.90	—	0.0	1	0.1	5	0.5
Greater Manchester	6,948.83	436	6.3	2	0.0	47	0.7
Gwent	1,232.80	31	2.5	1	0.1	10.2	0.8
Hampshire	3,489.53	182	5.2	4	0.1	36	1.0
Hertfordshire	1,739.93	63	3.6	0	0.0	26	1.5
Humberside	2,021.20	70	3.5	4	0.2	21	1.0
Kent	3,250.78	118	3.6	1	0.0	28	0.9
Lancashire	3,258.07	111	3.4	2	0.1	14	0.4
Leicestershire	1,983.06	115	5.8	2	0.1	21	1.1
Lincolnshire	1,191.05	36	3.0	0	0.0	8	0.7
Merseyside	4,216.41	160	3.8	9	0.2	15	0.4
Metropolitan police	26,093.79	1,164	4.5	42	0.2	212	0.8
Norfolk	1,429.55	55	3.8	3	0.2	12.25	0.9
Northamptonshire	1,168.73	52	4.4	2	0.2	8	0.7
Northumbria	3,768.78	227	6.0	7	0.2	29	0.8
North Wales	1,396.00	63	4.5	0	0.0	6	0.4
North Yorkshire	1,367.22	65	4.8	2	0.1	11	0.8
Nottinghamshire	2,324.75	0	0.0	0	0.0	14	0.6
South Wales	2,986.15	170	5.7	1	0.0	16	0.5
South Yorkshire	3,182.05	135	4.2	3	0.1	14	0.4
Staffordshire	2,292.10	220	9.6	3	0.1	19	0.8
Suffolk	1,185.80	69	5.8	1	0.1	8	0.7
Surrey	1,608.44	112	7.0	1	0.1	13	0.8
Sussex	3,037.74	136	4.5	5	0.2	47	1.5
Thames Valley	3,775.50	258	6.8	4	0.1	33	0.9
Warwickshire	924.10	54	5.8	3	0.3	2	0.2
West Mercia	2,009.58	62	3.1	5	0.2	16	0.8
West Midlands	7,155.53	445	6.2	12	0.2	48	0.7
West Yorkshire	5,154.70	182	3.5	7	0.1	44	0.9
Wiltshire	1,156.33	60	5.2	0	0.0	6	0.5
Provincial Total	98,707.73	4,668	4.7	112	0.1	712.45	0.7
England and Wales Total	124,801.50	5,832	4.7	154	0.1	924.45	0.7

Recruitment and wastage figures—police forces in England and Wales—1997–98

Forces	*Medical retirement*	*% of total strength*	*Ordinary retirement*	*% of total strength*	*Total retirements*	*% of total strength*
Avon and Somerset	66	2.2	57	1.9	123	4.1
Bedfordshire	23	2.1	23	2.1	46	4.3
Cambridgeshire	12	0.9	36	2.8	48	3.7
Cheshire	21	1.0	60	2.9	81	4.0
City of London	6	0.7	32	3.9	38	4.6
Cleveland	8	0.5	17	1.1	25	1.7
Cumbria	20	1.7	25	2.1	45	3.9
Derbyshire	51	2.9	27	1.5	78	4.4
Devon and Cornwall	22	0.7	88	3.0	110	3.7
Dorset	10	0.8	40	3.1	50	3.8
Durham	17	1.1	32	2.1	49	3.2
Dyfed-Powys	11	1.1	13	1.3	24	2.4
Essex	29	1.0	88	3.0	117	4.0
Gloucestershire	9	0.8	47	4.3	56	5.1
Greater Manchester	199	2.9	128	1.8	327	4.7
Gwent	15	1.2	17	1.4	32	2.6
Hampshire	30	0.9	70	2.0	100	2.9
Hertfordshire	17	1.0	35	2.0	52	3.0
Humberside	27	1.3	53	2.6	80	4.0
Kent	18	0.6	72	2.2	90	2.8
Lancashire	27	0.8	83	2.5	110	3.4
Leicestershire	25	1.3	34	1.7	59	3.0
Lincolnshire	28	2.4	30	2.5	58	4.9
Merseyside	80	1.9	71	1.7	151	3.6

Recruitment and wastage figures—police forces in England and Wales—1997–98

Forces	*Medical retirement*	*% of total strength*	*Ordinary retirement*	*% of total strength*	*Total retirements*	*% of total strength*
Metropolitan police	406	1.6	621	2.4	1,027	3.9
Norfolk	14.5	1.0	53	3.7	67.5	4.7
Northamptonshire	18	1.5	26	2.2	44	3.8
Northumbria	95	2.5	56	1.5	151	4.0
North Wales	11	0.8	29	2.1	40	2.9
North Yorkshire	22	1.6	23	1.7	45	3.3
Nottinghamshire	40	1.7	54	2.3	94	4.0
South Wales	69	2.3	71	2.4	140	4.7
South Yorkshire	29	0.9	64	2.0	93	2.9
Staffordshire	66	2.9	67	2.9	133	5.8
Suffolk	20	1.7	31	2.6	51	4.3
Surrey	10	0.6	63	3.9	73	4.5
Sussex	23	0.8	103	3.4	126	4.1
Thames Valley	40	1.1	83	2.2	123	3.3
Warwickshire	18	1.9	36	3.9	54	5.8
West Mercia	27	1.3	45	2.2	72	3.6
West Midlands	97	1.4	217	3.0	314	4.4
West Yorkshire	41	0.8	123	2.4	164	3.2
Wiltshire	9	0.8	38	3.3	47	4.1
Provincial Total	1,420.80	1.4	2,360.00	2.4	3,780.5	3.8
England and Wales Total	1,826.50	1.5	2,981.00	2.4	4,807.5	3.9

Police Surveillance

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has (i) to issue a code of practice as required in accordance with section 101 of Part III of the Police Act 1997 and (ii) to make an order under section 96 of the Police Act 1997 specifying the requirements for notifying a commissioner of authorisations, renewals and cancellations of authorisations. [60673]

Mr. Straw: Part III of the Police Act 1997 provides for a statutorily based system of authorisation for intrusive surveillance operations carried out by the police, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the National Crime Squad and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. As required by section 101 of the Act, before the provisions can be implemented, Parliament must approve an order bringing into force a code of practice for those carrying out functions under the Act. A public consultation exercise on the draft code of practice was carried out last year. Copies of the draft code were sent to over 500 individuals and organisations and 120 additional copies were provided in response to subsequent requests. By the end of the consultation period, 60 responses had been received. I have considered these representations very carefully, seeking to achieve a balance between the operational needs of law enforcement agencies in tackling serious crime and, at the same time, ensuring that adequate safeguards are in place to protect members of the public from unnecessary invasion of their privacy. As a result, I have made a number of changes to the text of the code. In particular:

there is specific reference to the confidential and sensitive nature of information relating to healthcare, counselling and legally privileged material;

emphasis is given to the importance of considering the effects of collateral intrusion on those who are not the targets of the authorisation;

further guidance is provided on when the urgency provisions should be used;

there is reference to the procedures for ensuring effective control on the handling, storage, processing and destruction of the surveillance product, especially sensitive and confidential material;

the code now includes an undertaking given by the law enforcement agencies covered by these provisions in relation to spiritual counselling; and

the requirements for notifications of authorisations, renewals and cancellations have been further refined.

With the appointment of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner and Commissioners, we are now in a position to implement the provisions of Part III of the Act. I have, therefore, today laid before Parliament a revised draft code of practice. I intend to bring this document into effect, together with the notification requirements required under section 96 of the Police Act 1997, as soon as practicable. I will seek approval of these Orders by resolution of both Houses of Parliament shortly.

Prisoners (Education)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of inmates of Her Majesty's prisons have achieved, as their highest level of educational qualification *(a)* NVQ 5 or equivalent, *(b)* NVQ 4 or equivalent, *(c)* NVQ 3 or equivalent, *(d)* NVQ 2 or equivalent, *(e)* NVQ 1 or equivalent and *(f)* none of these. [50156]

Mr. George Howarth: Results of the Basic Skills Agency screening tests carried out on prisoners between January and the end of September 1998 are set out in Table 1. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the numbers of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and equivalent qualifications achieved by prisoners for the same period.

It is not possible to say to what proportion of the prison population these data relate, whether these achievements are their highest level of educational qualification, or what proportion of the prison population have none of these

qualifications. In order to provide this information, it would be necessary to examine individual prisoners' records.

Table 1: Basic Skills Agency screening tests—January to September 1998

	Literacy	*Numeracy*
Number of prisoners tested	34,791	44,033
Below Level 1		
number	12,744	15,065
percentage	36.6	34.2
At Level 1		
number	11,715	15,607
percentage	33.7	35.5
Above Level 1		
number	10,332	13,361
percentage	29.7	30.3

Table 2: NVQs attained by prisoners—January to September 1998

NVQ level and equivalent	*Number of units achieved*
5	1
4	17
3	430
2	7,832
1	15,220
Entry	98
Total	23,598

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60214]

Mr. Straw: My Department has carefully considered the Taskforce 2000 analysis. The majority of the concerns expressed can be traced to misinterpretation of published quarterly progress reports.

In particular, the analysis referred to changes to the Department's Year 2000 programme. The definition of what was a business critical system had been tightened to focus effort on those vital to the provision of key services. Agencies were reported on separately. Both changes were made in the spirit of openness, and with a view to improving programme management and visibility of key processes.

The increase in costs relates to the emergence of a clearer picture of the Year 2000 programme. The increase is not outside the range of what might be expected, given the nature of the task.

Taskforce 2000 was also concerned that end dates for some critical systems extended into 1999. The majority of these systems are expected to be Year 2000 compliant by March 1999. As a matter of prudence, the business processes concerned will be covered by contingency plans to ensure continuance of service.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the Home Office's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library and published on the Internet.

Open Government

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to promote the greater use of the code on open government. [58927]

Mr. Straw: All Government Department, agencies and public bodies under the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration are committed to providing information in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I will publish the annual monitoring report on the operation of the Code of Practice next spring. Those bodies covered by the Code have been encouraged to make full use of the discretion available under the Code of Practice to disclose as much information as possible in the period before a Freedom of Information Act comes into force.

Countryside Alliance

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress the Data Protection Registrar has made in her investigation of the sale by the Countryside Alliance of its membership mailing list to the Conservative Party; and if he will make a statement. [59607]

Mr. George Howarth: The Data Protection Registrar acts independently of government in the exercise of her functions under the Data Protection Act 1984. I understand that her investigation is continuing and that she will be writing to my hon. Friend to let him know how matters stand.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisoners (Early Release)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what have been the *(a)* maximum, *(b)* minimum and *(c)* average periods of time taken to process applications for the early release of a prisoner under the early release provisions; and what period of time is taken by the appointed members of the commission on each application; [59082]

(2) how many applications for early release have been received from persons convicted of terrorist-type crimes; and of these how many have been received from each terrorist or paramilitary group which has members in prison; [59084]

(3) how many applications for early release from prison under the Good Friday Agreement have been refused. [59070]

Mr. Ingram: Statutory responsibility for these matters lies with the Sentence Review Commissioners. I have asked the joint Chairmen, Sir John Blelloch and Mr. Brian Currin, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Brian Currin to Mr. William Ross, dated 17 November 1998:

You recently asked three questions of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for information concerning applications made under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. In her answer the Secretary of State advised that, as statutory responsibility for this matter lay with the Sentence Review Commissioners, I would respond.

I can advise that, up until 12 November, the maximum, minimum and average times taken to process an application from its initial receipt to the Substantive Determination stage is as follows:

Maximum time: 78 days

Minimum time: 31 days

Average time: 64 days

The range of time taken to process applications is a reflection both of the differing complexity of cases and the fact that, following receipt of 450 applications in August, the Commissioners decided to prioritise cases based on the prospective date of release for each prisoner.

You asked for information on what period of time is taken by the appointed members of the Commission on each application. Unfortunately information is not recorded in a format which would enable us to provide an answer to your question. The Commissioners are involved in a number of distinct areas in the processing of each application; for instance, each application is allocated to a Single Commissioner who is responsible for ancillary decisions and ensuring that all relevant information is available for the application to be forwarded to a panel of Commissioners for consideration. A panel consists of three Commissioners and is responsible for considering the application and response papers and giving a "Preliminary Indication" of their decision. If there is no challenge to the Preliminary Indication then the Commissioners will confirm it in the form of a Substantive Determination. In the event of a challenge by either the applicant or respondent, the Commissioners set aside the Preliminary Indication and convene a hearing prior to making a Substantive Determination.

We have received 461 applications from prisoners who have been convicted of scheduled offences. Of these, 203 are perceived to be affiliated to PIRA, 82 to UDA, 61 to UVF, 7 to LVF, 22 to INLA and 86 applications from prisoners who have no clear affiliation to any of the terrorist organisations listed above.

In response to your question as to how many applications have been refused, I can advise that, up until 12 November, there has been no Substantive Determination advising that the applicant had been unsuccessful. There have, however, been 61 applications returned because the applicants did not meet the eligibility criteria as laid down in the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the library of the House of Commons.

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the schedule of dates to fly the Union Flag has been made available to the Roads Service Maintenance Depot, 17 Ballynahonemore Road, Armagh City; if the Union Flag was flown at the Depot on Remembrance Sunday; and if she will make a statement. [59383]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 17 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to respond to your recently tabled PQ about the flying of the Union Flag at the Roads Service maintenance depot at 17 Ballynahonemore Road, Armagh.

The Roads Service maintenance depot at 17 Ballynahonemore Road, Armagh, has been provided with a schedule of dates on which the Union Flag should be flown. However due to an oversight the flag was not flown on Remembrance Sunday, 8 November 1998 at this location.

I apologise for any offence this may have caused.

Schools (Project Funding)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial allocation will be made to *(a)* maintained and *(b)* controlled schools sector in terms of capital and revenue projects in each of the next three years. [59540]

Mr. McFall: The Capital and recurrent allocations for the schools sector for the 1999–2000 financial year cannot be decided until the Comprehensive Spending Review is completed. At that stage the delegated recurrent budgets for schools in the controlled and maintained sectors would be a matter for the Education and Library Boards. Capital funding for major works projects will be allocated by DENI to the highest priority needs.

Objective 1 Status

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the negotiations within the European Union regarding Objective 1 status for Northern Ireland. [59539]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Under the draft Structural Funds Regulations which have been published by the European Commission, the qualifying economic criterion for Objective 1 is a GDP of under 75 per cent. of EU average. If this criterion is rigidly applied, as currently seems likely to be the case, Northern Ireland would not qualify for a continuation of its Objective 1 status. However, there are good reasons for Northern Ireland to continue to receive substantial EU funding and every effort will be made in the ongoing negotiations to secure the best possible deal, commensurate with its special circumstances, to help in adapting the region's economy to peace both economically and socially.

Roads (South Down)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to introduce new roads infrastructure schemes in South Down. [59538]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 17 November 1998:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to respond to your recently tabled PQ about new road infrastructure proposals in South Down.

In addition to a significant programme of road maintenance and minor road works schemes, Roads Service proposes to provide a by-pass of Ballynahinch. The scheme is included in the 6–15 year major road works programme and will be implemented at a pace dictated by future funding levels and the priority awarded to such schemes by the new Northern Ireland Assembly.

I hope you find this helpful.

Planning Applications

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish details of each outstanding major industrial and commercial planning application, indicating the date on which each application for planning permission was lodged with the Planning Service in Northern Ireland. [59858]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart, I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Armed Robberies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many armed robberies there have been in the City of Belfast in each week in October and November to the latest available date; to which terrorist/paramilitary groups these thefts were attributed; and what estimate she has made of the amounts stolen. [59568]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The RUC have advised that there have been no armed robberies, during the period in question, which can be attributed to either Loyalist or Republican paramilitary groups.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of her Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60222]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Taskforce 2000 report provided a comprehensive assessment of the state of preparedness of our Northern Ireland departments as it existed at the end of the summer period. We welcome any independent analysis of our published returns as a double check on analysis carried out in-house.

The conclusions of the Taskforce 2000 report match closely to our own in-house analysis. The Departments concerned are well aware of the problem areas identified and were already acting on these prior to the publication of the Taskforce 2000 report.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the NIO latest quarterly return will be placed in the Libraries of the House and on the Internet.

Decommissioning Commission

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means and with what regularity General John de Chastelain's Decommissioning Commission reports to the British and Irish Governments; and when she expects to call for a formal written report. [60242]

Mr. Ingram: As provided for in the Belfast Agreement, the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reports regularly and frequently to both Governments, through contacts at both Ministerial and official level. I have no plans, at this time, to call for a formal written report.

Security Structures (Demolition)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will identify those permanent security structures which are currently under consideration for demolition. [60241]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are committed to returning Northern Ireland to normal policing and security arrangements as soon as it is safe to do so. This is clearly set out in the Good Friday Agreement. However we can only move as fast as the security situation allows. The Chief Constable keeps the situation under constant review. Security structures will only be removed where this is consistent with the level of threat.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of her Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60223]

Mr. Foulkes: We value independent assessment of our plans. The Taskforce report notes that the overall programme has slipped by three months from our last return. However, we are confident that all business critical systems will be compliant and business continuity plans in place by the year 2000. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of DFID's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library of the House and published on the Internet.

Nepal

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to visit the Nepal Leprosy Fellowship on her visit to Nepal later this month. [59851]

Mr. Foulkes: The Secretary of State did not visit the Nepal Leprosy Fellowship during her visit to Nepal. The purpose of the visit was to help build a new development relationship with Nepal with poverty elimination at its core. It included discussions with government, donors and civil society organisations on how better health services could be provided for poor people.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultation he undertook and what evidence his Department evaluated before setting an age limit of 20 years, before which a disability must have occurred, in applications for severe disablement allowance. [58580]

Mr. Timms: We consulted widely following the publication in March of the Government's Green Paper "New ambitions for our country: A new contract for welfare" and received over 1,050 responses from numerous organisations including organisations of and for

disabled people. One of the concerns they raised was the low level of Severe Disablement Allowance compared to the long-term rate of Incapacity Benefit.

The proposals for reform of Severe Disablement Allowance, set out in the Consultation Paper "Support for Disabled People", increase the level of benefit payable to people who become disabled early in life and claim benefit before the age of 20 to the long-term rate of Incapacity Benefit (£78.30 a week at 1998–99 rates). By the age of 20, those who wish to try work should have been able to discover whether or not employment is a realistic option. Those aged 20 or over, who become disabled or long-term sick later in life, will have had the opportunity to work and pay contributions to qualify for Incapacity Benefit in the normal way.

We are consulting on these proposals and we will consider all comments and alternative proposals made as part of the consultation process. The consultation period ends on 8 January 1999.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will announce the result of his Department's review of housing benefit. [59059]

Angela Eagle: We have announced a project to simplify the Housing Benefit rules and regulations and to improve delivery of the benefit. We are working in conjunction with Local Authority Associations and further announcements will be made in due course. In addition, we have also announced a small-scale pilot which will examine the issues surrounding the underoccupation of social housing.

Lone Parents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under the New Deal for Lone Parents, how many lone parents, broken down by constituency, *(a)* received initial invitation letters, *(b)* booked initial interviews with personal advisers, *(c)* attended initial interviews, *(d)* agreed to participate in the programme following an initial interview, *(e)* were referred to Employment Service programmes or other training, *(f)* obtained jobs following participation and *(g)* have increased their hours of work following participation; and where a job has been obtained, or hours of work have been increased, how many lone parents (i) are in work where the hours are (A) less than 16 hours per week, (B) between 16 and 29 hours per week and (C) 30 hours per week or more, (ii) have moved off income support as a result, (iii) have a child under five years and three months of age, (iv) in cases where the youngest child is over five years and three months put themselves forward before receiving an invitation letter and (v) were given help with making an application for family credit. [58711]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The information requested broken down by constituency is not available. It is possible to provide a partial reply broken down by Employment Service regions. The information is set out in the table.

Cumulative figures for phase 1 and 2 to 25 September 1998

Data item	*Regional totals Laser*[1]	*Scotland*[2]	*Northern*	*South West*	*Wales*[3]	*North West*[4]	*Yorks and Humberside*[5]	*West Midlands*[6]	*East Midlands*[7]	*National totals*
a. Number of initial letters issued[8]	11,994	4,044	1,275	1,470	5,071	5,815	5,474	6,154	7,097	48,394
b. Number of initial interviews booked	7,759	2,485	852	1,468	2,567	3,374	2,223	3,624	2,582	26,934
c. Number of initial interviews carried out	5,691	1,768	594	1,059	2,069	2,558	1,740	2,897	2,037	20,413
d. Number agreeing to participate in NDLP	4,973	1,512	494	884	1,949	2,252	1,472	2,506	1,616	17,658
e. Referrals to Employment Service[9] programme or other training	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
f. Total number of jobs obtained	912	353	76	122	687	701	419	934	541	4,745
g. Number of lone parents who have increased their hours	142	44	8	52	82	92	65	127	82	694
i) Jobs obtained/hours increased, number of lone parents who[10]:										
(a) work less than 16 hours per week	54	95	46	8	18	11	28	76	30	366
(b) work 16–29 hours per week (phase 2 only)	122	288	161	54	99	122	175	122	106	1,249
(c) work 30 hours or more per week (phase 2 only)	62	296	111	20	70	40	82	72	51	804
ii) have left Income Support as a result[11]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
iii) obtained jobs/increased hours have a child under five years and three months of age	129	370	272	40	123	87	318	359	149	1,847

Cumulative figures for phase 1 and 2 to 25 September 1998

Data item	*Regional totals Laser*[1]	*Scotland*[2]	*Northern*	*South West*	*Wales*[3]	*North West*[4]	*Yorks and Humberside*[5]	*West Midlands*[6]	*East Midlands*[7]	*National totals*
iv) are early starters (ie lone parents with child/(ren) over 5yrs and 3mths who put themselves forward for NDLP before receiving an invitation letter)[12]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
v) were given help with making an application for Family Credit[13]	545	145	72	156	241	243	150	190	160	1,902

	Cambridgeshire	*North Cheshire*	*North Worcestershire*	*Sheffield East*	*Cardiff and Vale*	*Clyde Valley*	*North Surrey*	*Warwickshire*	*Total*
Prototype[10] (i,c) work over 16 hours per week (phase 1)	385	473	398	297	484	209	372	393	3,011

In the table, results from the prototype areas are included in the following regions[1-7]:

[1] Includes North Surrey prototype

[2] Includes Clyde Valley prototype

[3] Includes Cardiff and Vale Prototype

[4] Includes North Cheshire prototype

[5] Includes Sheffield East prototype

[6] Includes Warwickshire and North Worcestershire prototype

[7] Includes Cambridgeshire prototype

[8] Information on the number of lone parents who have received initial invitation letters is not available, but information is available on the number of initial invitation letters issued.

[9] Information on the number of lone parents that have been referred to Employment Service programmes or other training is not available.

[10] Information on (i) includes lone parents who have obtained jobs or increased their working hours. It is not possible to provide the information under all parts of (i) separately for those lone parents who have *(a)* obtained jobs or *(b)* increased their working hours.

[11] Information on the number of lone parents who have left Income Support as a result of obtaining a job is not available from the management information statistics. However, it is safe to assume that lone parents who work over 16 hours per week would have left Income Support.

[12] Information on the number of early starters in the target group who have obtained jobs is not available.

[13] Information on the number of lone parents who have obtained jobs/increased their working hours and been given help with making a family credit application is available only for phase 2.

n/a = Not available.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of raising the upper capital threshold for pensioner claimants of income support to *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000 and *(c)* £20,000. [58969]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The estimated costs are *(a)* £5 million, *(b)* £20 million, *(c)* £20 million.

Notes:

1. These figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million and are based upon the Department's Policy Simulation Model of income-related benefits. This model draws data from the 1995–6 Family Resources Survey, uprated to 1999–2000 levels, and calibrates results to forecast benefit caseloads. This calibration is consistent with the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review forecasts.

2. For capital costings, estimates are further adjusted using May 1997 administrative data results in order to bring them into line with known reported capital on administrative data. In the absence of any other information, the same adjustments have been applied to estimated existing gainers and floaters-on. The caseloads involved in these costings are very small and the figures are thus subject to sampling error. Whilst we would expect variant *(c)* to cost more than variant *(b)* this difference is lost in the rounding that is essential when dealing with such small sample numbers. Estimates from household surveys based on reported capital holdings are subject to low levels of response and high levels of imputation. Consequently they should be interpreted not as precise point estimates, but rather as indicative of broad magnitudes.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, for the purposes of calculating SERPS entitlements, payments of the working families tax credit will be treated in the same way as family credit payments. [58971]

Mr. Denham: All matters relating to Pensions are being considered as part of the Pensions Review.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1998, to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), *Official Report*, columns *603–05*, how many pensioners are currently receiving payments of *(a)* basic pension, *(b)* SERPS and *(c)* either basic pension or SERPS, where the Department cannot be certain that the correct amount is in payment. [59101]

Mr. Timms: It is estimated that potentially some 30,000 basic pensions could be underpaid and some 163,000 SERPS could be underpaid. It is not possible to estimate how many people will be receiving underpayments of both basic pension and SERPS. In addition, it is possible that some of the estimated 6,000 emergency awards paid without the availability of the NIRS contributions record could be overpaid.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net cost for 1999–2000, of increasing the basic retirement pension and linked benefits received by people over pension age to £75 for a single person in April 1999, (i) with and

(ii) without a similar percentage increase for couples; and what increase in contribution rates would be needed to cover the gross and net costs respectively. [59757]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Benefit costs of increasing Retirement Pension (RP) in 1999–2000

£ billion

	(i)	*(ii)*
Gross cost	4.0	3.5
Means-tested benefit offset	1.0	*
Net costs	3.0	*

Notes:

1. Gross costs have been estimated by the Government Actuary's Department.
2. Means-tested benefit offsets are based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1999–2000 benefit and earnings levels.
3. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion.
4. '*' A means-tested benefit offset is not available for this part. Offsets are calculated using the Family Resources Survey which does not differentiate between married women who receive a Category A pension and those who receive a Category BL pension.
5. Where both members of a couple are in receipt of a full Category A pension they have each been awarded a basic state pension of £75 per week. For cases in receipt of less than full-rate Category A, their award of Category A is pro rated according to the percentage of the full pension received. However, it is not possible to identify the Category A element of a pension received by Category ABL cases. Thus the cost of increasing Category A pension for these cases has not been taken into account in part (ii).
6. Components may not sum to totals due to rounding.

National Insurance Contributions (NICs) rates necessary to cover the gross costs

percentage

	Current rates	*(i)*	*(ii)*
Employee NICs rate	10	10.8	10.8
Employer NICs rate	12.2	12.8	12.7

Notes:

1. Changes in contribution rates have been estimated by the Government Actuary's Department.
2. The estimates assume that the Lower Earnings Limit is raised to the level of the Category A pension, with consequent changes in the Upper Earnings Limit, Upper Profits Limit, Class 2 and Class 3 contribution rates. The extra cost of these changes has been added to the cost of increasing RP rates, when calculating the necessary changes in contribution rates.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he next expects to meet pensioners' organisations to discuss the uprating of pensions and associated issues; and if he will make a statement. [59524]

Mr. Denham: As part of the pensions review, Ministers have met representatives of pensioners' organisations regularly to discuss a broad range of issues, including uprating. We expect meetings with pensioners organisations to continue both before and after the publication of the Green Paper.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the pensions review to report its findings. [59469]

Mr. Denham: As set out in the Green Paper "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare" (Cm 3805), we intend to publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year.

Annual Benefit Uprating

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the minimum interval required for operational purposes between the announcement and implementation of the annual benefit uprating. [59758]

Angela Eagle: The Benefits Agency has a well established uprating plan that is currently based on the uprating announcement being made by late November/ early December.

Child Maintenance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the percentage of compliance with orders for child maintenance was in the period before the Child Support Act 1991 came into effect. [59647]

Angela Eagle: Before the launch of the Child Support Agency in April 1993, child maintenance was dealt with by the Department's liable relative officers where the parent with care was on benefit, or by the courts if neither parent was on benefit. A study of compliance with maintenance orders and agreements, carried out in 1990, showed that two in five Departmental cases with a maintenance order or agreement had one or more periods where the non-resident parent did not pay maintenance. In approximately 40 per cent. of cases with arrears, the arrears were not recovered in full. The study also found that one in three cases with maintenance orders in Magistrates courts were recorded as having had arrears at some time.

Benefits Offices (Vale of White Horse)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he *(a)* decided on and *(b)* announced the proposal to close the local benefits offices in the Vale of White Horse District Council area. [60176]

Angela Eagle: The Benefits Agency's Abingdon office closed on 25 October 1996 along with the Wantage caller outlet which was housed in the local Council Offices.

The decision to close the offices was made by the previous Government in September 1996 and announced to Members of Parliament and other interested parties by the then Under-Secretary of State for Social Security on 2 October 1996.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Benefit Integrity Project cases have been reviewed; and how many people have appealed against the adjudicator's decision *(a)* successfully and *(b)* unsuccessfully. [60303]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Burstow dated 17 November 1998:

I am replying to your recent question asking what the total number of Benefit Integrity Project (BIP) cases reviewed is; and how many people have appealed against the adjudicator's decision (a) successfully and (b) unsuccessfully.

As at 30 September 1998, a total of 265,659 cases, including 42,892 renewal cases have been selected for action under BIP.

At the same date a total of 137,871 cases have been examined. Of the total cases dealt with 3,132 have resulted in an increase in benefit, 105,353 have remained unchanged, 18,120 have resulted in a reduction in benefit, and 11,266 have resulted in benefit being stopped.

The total included 29,548 renewal cases, of which 940 have resulted in an increase in benefit, 14,686 have remained unchanged, 8,415 have resulted in a reduction in benefit, and 5,507 have resulted in benefit being stopped.

The number of people who have asked for a review following the BIP decision and the outcome of those reviews is shown in the table at Annex 1.

The number of people who have appealed against the adjudicator's decision and the outcome of those appeals is shown in the table at Annex 2.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex 1—Number of reviews completed by BIP and the outcome

	Method of completion			
	Postal	*Visit*	*Renewal*	*Total*
Total	6,866	2,224	7,178	16,268
The review decision:				
Maintained[1]	4,581	1,361	4,307	10,249
Percentage	66.72	61.20	60.00	63.00
Decreased[2]	190	57	174	421
Percentage	2.77	2.56	2.42	2.59
Increased[3]	896	331	1,131	2,358
Percentage	13.05	14.88	15.76	14.50
Reverted to original award	1,144	432	1,382	2,958
Percentage	16.66	19.42	19.25	18.18
Extended[4]	55	43	184	282
Percentage	0.80	1.93	2.56	1.73

[1] Maintained: The BIP decision has not been changed on review
[2] Decreased: DLA has been further reduced on review
[3] Increased: DLA has been increased to a higher rate on review but not necessarily restored to the pre BIP rate
[4] Extended: The rate of benefit has not been changed but the length of award has been extended

Notes:
1. Please note these are all changes to the BIP decision, following 1st tier review, and not to the original award.
2. The figures in the above table refer to the review cases which have been cleared and input to the BIP database as opposed to the number of review requests received.
3. Total number of reviews received and registered on DLA Computer System—20,803.
4. Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Source:
Figures provided by BIP

Annex 2—Number of appeals following review

	Number
Total number of appeals received	5,160
Number of appeals prepared and passed to ITS	4,316
Number of appeals cleared and registered on database	719
Appeals outstanding	4,441

Note:
Figures are provisional and subject to change
Source:
Figures provided by BIP project

Annex 2—Outcome of appeals

	Method of completion			
Decision	*Postal*	*Visit*	*Renewal*	*Total*
BIP decision maintained	157	17	138	312
Restored to original award	92	39	58	189
Restored to a rate lower than the original but higher than the BIP decision	91	19	73	183
Reduced to a rate lower than the BIP decision	3	0	4	7
Restored to a higher rate	17	0	11	28
Total	360	75	284	719

Note:
Figures are provisional and subject to change
Source:
Figures provided by BIP project

New Deal

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact on people suffering from mental health problems of a requirement to attend an interview with a personal adviser. [60395]

Angela Eagle: In the command paper, "A New Contract for Welfare: The Gateway to Work", presented to Parliament on 28 October, we recognised that for some people an immediate interview about work may not be appropriate. This would clearly be true of someone suffering from a severe mental illness. For them, the priority will be to pay the benefit to which they are entitled and to make sure all their welfare needs are properly identified. All cases will be handled with sensitivity and in a way that takes account of individual circumstances.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to modify proposals for a single gateway adviser to deal with the elderly, with particular reference to unclaimed benefits. [59468]

Mr. Denham: We have recently completed research into why some pensioners do not claim their entitlements. And we have also just completed nine pilots to test ways of identifying pensioners with potential entitlement to Income Support and ways of encouraging them to claim. We are currently evaluating the results of both the research and the pilots and will then consider the best way forward.

Housing Benefit (Wales)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of housing benefit in Wales. [60544]

Angela Eagle: We have announced a project to simplify the Housing Benefit rules and regulations and to improve delivery of the benefit. We are working closely with local government associations and with other Government Departments with the aim of ensuring that we make Housing Benefit a simple and understandable benefit which is administered efficiently and securely. Any changes in the rules of entitlement will apply throughout Great Britain.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60224]

Mr. Timms: We have noted the conclusions of Taskforce 2000, published on 11 November, in respect of this Department. We are content with what amounts to a commendation of our efforts to date. However, given the significant risks posed by this issue, no-one can afford to be complacent. We are maintaining our approach and commitment to avert any material disruption arising from the year 2000 date change.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of this Department's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library and published on the Internet.

Welfare Reform

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the co-ordination of Government policy on welfare reform. [58934]

Mr. Denham: The Prime Minister chairs a Ministerial Group to co-ordinate welfare reform across government.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many requests for appeals have been refused by the Independent Tribunal Service in each of their offices in England and Wales in Child Support Agency cases; what percentage of total requests this is; and how many breached the 28 day time limit. [60309]

Angela Eagle: The Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) does not receive requests for appeals. The President, His Honour Judge Harris, will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

DEFENCE

Navy Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Royal Navy *(a)* officers and *(b)* ratings have been (i) dismissed from the service and (ii) court-martialled in each of the last five years; [56061]

(2) how many Royal Navy personnel have left service on health grounds in each of the last five years. [58284]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of RAF aircraft, by type, are available for service immediately. [56037]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the treatment of animals in research projects carried out by his Department. [55367]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) on 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *40*.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on *(a)* defence-related capital projects and *(b)* maintaining the military presence in the Falklands in each year since the end of the Falklands War. [57856]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My Department does not hold centrally the entire cost of maintaining the military presence in the Falklands since the Falklands Campaign. However, our records show the following expenditure:

£ million

Years	*(a) Garrison capital costs*	*(b) Garrison total costs (including capital costs)*
1983–84	192	391
1984–85	219	403
1985–86	221	396
1986–87	110	236
1987–88	42	118
1988–89	3	59
1989–90	2	60
1990–91	figures no longer held	66
1991–92	figures no longer held	51
1992–93	figures no longer held	58
1993–94	figures no longer held	67
1994–95	1	66
1995–96	3	66
1996–97	6	81
1997–98	3	76

Notes:

1. All figures £ million in-year cash.
2. Garrison capital costs between 1983–88 include the construction costs of Mount Pleasant Airfield.
3. Garrison costs after 1990–91 omit a number of elements, e.g. freight, food and spares, which were previously included in the Garrison costs but which are no longer attributed to the Commander British Forces Falkland Islands' Budget, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Figures from 1991–92 onwards include pay, which was not included in the figures compiled previously, and again pay for the period could be provided only at disproportionate cost.
4. The figures given do not include residual costs of the Falklands Campaign.
5. Garrison costs from 1991–92 include the costs of the Commander British Forces Falkland Islands' budget only. These do not include the costs of the RAF airbridge to the Falkland Islands, or the cost of naval deployments to the South Atlantic. These figures fall to other budgets and cannot be identified separately. It is not known whether these costs were included in figures before 1991–92.

Menwith Hill

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements are in place to ensure continued US Government funding of the buildings and equipment at Menwith Hill Station. [57318]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Services Uniforms

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of armed services uniforms are currently supplied by companies operating *(a)* offshore and *(b)* in Britain. [58784]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 9 November 1998]:* The information is not available in the form requested. It is possible, however, to give information on the total value of current contracts that have been placed centrally for clothing worn by members of the armed services. The total value of such contracts as at 6 November 1998 is £164.5m. Of these, contracts to the value of £120.63m have been placed with UK firms.

The value of contract with UK firms where the work is carried out overseas, including by overseas sub-contractors, is £43.17m.

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many doctors have left employment with his Department before retirement age in each of the last five years, by service; and how many have left on health grounds; [58743]

(2) how many nurses have left employment with each service before retirement age in each of the last five years; and how many have left on health grounds. [59207]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces (Youth Recruitment)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of 17 to 21-year-olds from the Doncaster borough are currently serving in Her Majesty's armed forces. [59306]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Property Sales

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* Territorial Army centres and *(b)* other property whose sale will contribute towards his Department's target of £700 million from sales of property; and what estimate he has made of the receipts from each of these categories. [59353]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Details of the future Territorial Army Centres are contained in Modern Forces for a Modern World: A Territorial Army for a Modern World, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House yesterday.

The Library already holds a list of some 220 Ministry of Defence sites that are with the Defence Estate Organisation for disposal. The receipts from these sites will contribute to my Department's target of £700 million from sales of property.

In July, when we announced the Strategic Defence Review, we estimated that the sale of TA sites would contribute some £30 million to the £700 million target. This estimate will be refined now it has been confirmed which property will be surplus to requirements.

Armed Services (Millennium Bug)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the armed services will be charging *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* health authorities and *(c)* other organisations which request them to be on standby over the millennium to deal with consequences of the millennium bug. [59587]

Mr. Doug Henderson: HM Treasury rules for Government Accounting require my Department to raise charges when carrying out activities other than our central defence tasks. Accordingly, if military assistance were to be provided to health organisations or other organisations charges would be raised. These charges would vary according to the circumstances, and may be waived altogether in cases involving immediate danger to human life.

Territorial Army

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will postpone his plans to cut the TA until 2000. [60263]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We announced our plans for the future of the Territorial Army in the House on 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 749–52.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will defer consideration of any reduction in the Territorial Army until January 2000 or until all millennium bug problems have been eradicated. [59619]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* There is no identified requirement for military assistance, including use of the Reserves, in the event of any problems arising on the millennium, that justified deferring the announcement in the House of the necessary modernisation of the Territorial Army on 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 749–52.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the organisations and people consulted prior to the development of contingency plans for the deployment of the Territorial Army in Cambridgeshire in the event of civil disturbance arising from the millennium bug; [59617]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the contingency plans for the deployment of the Territorial Army in Cambridgeshire in the event of civil disturbance arising from the millennium bug. [59618]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* No contingency plans have been drawn up for the deployment of the Territorial Army in Cambridgeshire in the event of civil disturbances arising from the millennium bug. But long-standing arrangements exist under which military assistance can be requested by the civil authorities in the United Kingdom in the event of a civil emergency.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the role of the TA in dealing with the effects of the millennium bug. [60264]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan) on 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *171*.

Water Cannon (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which years since 1968 water cannon have been used by the armed forces in Northern Ireland; and how many times water cannon were used by the armed forces in Northern Ireland. [60335]

Mr. George Robertson: Records relating to the use of water cannons in Northern Ireland are not available. However, we believe that water cannons were withdrawn from use in the Province in the early 1970s.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the facilities and buildings currently *(a)* under construction, *(b)* undergoing refurbishment and *(c)* in the design stage, indicating their purpose and their estimated total cost at (i) AWE Aldermaston and (ii) AWE Burghfield; [60020]

(2) how much money was spent at AWE in each of the last five years and how much is projected to be spent in the next five years on new building programmes and refurbishment of existing facilities to meet *(a)* current safety standards and *(b)* the requirements of the Trident warhead programme; and what proportion of this expenditure is being met by Hunting BRAE. [60019]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Trident

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department will spend on the construction of the refit facilities at Devonport. [60022]

Mr. George Robertson: The estimated cost of the project management, design, construction and commissioning of the refitting facilities for Trident and other nuclear submarines, at Devonport, is £417 million, as reported in the National Audit Office Report on the Sales of the Royal Dockyards, dated 3 June 1998. A copy of this report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the $107 million listed in the financial addendum to the US/UK Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Joint US/UK Trident D-5 Missile Production Program is included in the authorised US fiscal year 1999 UK Trident procurement in the USA. [60024]

Mr. George Robertson: Of the $107 million, $100.6 million was included in our US fiscal year 1999 budget authorisation. The remaining $6.4 million was included in our US fiscal year 1998 authorisation.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much is paid annually to the US Government to guarantee the servicing of the UK Trident missile stock; and if this money is part of the estimated Trident running costs. [60023]

Mr. George Robertson: US and UK Trident missiles are held as mingled stock; there are no UK missiles as such. We contribute to the overall cost of the US Navy's Strategic Weapons Facility Atlantic at Kings Bay, Georgia, where missiles are stored, assembled and serviced. These contributions are based on the UK's share of the overall missile inventory and will vary from year to year, our planned contribution in financial year 1998–99 amounts to some £7.5 million. These costs include both acquisition and operating costs.

Gulf War

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *348–49*, for what reasons his Department is undertaking a review of events concerning 32 Field Hospital; when this review started; when it is expected to end; and who is carrying out this review. [60330]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Pursuant to my answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *348–49*, my Department is undertaking a review of events concerning 32 Field Hospital, a UK unit which took part in the Gulf conflict, and the release of nerve agent arising from the US demolition of Iraqi munitions at the Khamisiyah depot in March 1991, in order to answer two Parliamentary Questions tabled in another place by the Countess of Mar on 30 October 1997. Officials in my Department's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit commenced this review in October 1997. A report of the review is currently being written up and is expected to be completed shortly. I expect to place a copy of the report in the House of Commons Library in due course.

CR Gas

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has made of whether short-term exposure to CR gas can harm human health in the long term. [60328]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 28 November 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your Question about the long term effects of short term exposure to CR gas on human health.

Biomedical studies conducted at DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD) at Porton Down, and elsewhere, show CR to be a potent sensory irritant with a relatively low toxicity. It has no organ-specific toxicity. CR does not appear to accumulate following short term exposure and it is apparently devoid of long term or chronic toxic effects.

I hope this is helpful.

Rubber Bullets (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the armed forces *(a)* first and *(b)* last used rubber bullets in Northern Ireland; in which years since 1968 they used rubber bullets in Northern Ireland; how many rubber bullets they used in Northern Ireland in each of those years; and how many rubber bullets they have used in Northern Ireland since 1968. [60334]

Mr. George Robertson: The Armed Forces and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) first used rubber bullets in 1970 and last used them in 1975. The number of bullets used in Northern Ireland in each of those years is set out in the table:

Year	*Number*
1970	238
1971	16,752
1972	23,363
1973	12,724
1974	2,612
1975	145
Total	55,834

The records relating to rubber bullets used in Northern Ireland were maintained manually and to retrieve and split the information between the Armed Forces and the RUC would, even if possible, involve disproportionate costs.

In 1973 plastic baton rounds were introduced and eventually replaced rubber bullets completely in 1976.

Public Relations

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was spent in the last financial year on public relations by the *(a)* AWEs, *(b)* Royal Ordnance plc, *(c)* British Army, *(d)* Royal Navy, *(e)* RAF and *(f)* Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [60021]

Mr. Spellar: Public relations expenditure by the organisations listed during the last financial year was:

Organisations	£
(a) Atomic Weapons Establishments (AWE)	250,000
(c) Army	618,000
(d) Royal Navy	1,160,000
(e) Royal Air Force	911,000
(f) DERA	232,000

Figures for the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force include staff and programme costs for London Headquarters staff only. Expenditure on public relations activities outside my Department's headquarters is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public relations expenditure by *(b)* Royal Ordnance is a matter for Royal Ordnance plc.

Porton Down

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *1110–11*, on the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (Porton Down) Technical Papers, how many papers in the DERA reports series of technical papers are currently unclassified; when the DERA reports series of papers *(a)* started and *(b)* finished; and how many papers have so far been produced in the DERA reports series of papers. [60333]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 18 November 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your Question about the DERA Reports series of technical papers, issued by DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD).

The series was started in April 1997 and is ongoing. To date 149 reports have been produced of which 49 are unclassified.

I hope this is helpful.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60117]

Mr. Spellar: Considerable progress is being made with a programme to ensure that MOD and Defence Agencies' critical computer systems and equipment with embedded chips are rectified before the millennium and other critical dates. In addition, contingency plans for critical systems are being developed where necessary. In terms of wider contingency planning for the millennium problem, long-standing arrangements exist under which local authorities can request military assistance, for example in the case of a civil emergency or natural disaster.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest assessment of the risks to UK Defence readiness in 1999–2000 from the *(a)* millennium computer problem and *(b)* embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [59951]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* The assessment of the risk to UK Defence readiness is performed by relating Defence capabilities to the computer systems and embedded chips which support them. A programme is in place to correct as a priority those critical systems the failure of which could adversely affect Defence capabilities. Where we see risks that programme slippage may occur, contingency plans are being produced. The overall programme is designed to ensure that Defence readiness will not be compromised.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement; [60114]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the cost of resolving *(a)* the millennium computer problem and *(b)* the embedded chip problem, for the United Kingdom's armed forces; how much of this total has been spent to date; and if he will make a statement; [59950]

(3) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies to which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [60116]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments' and agencies' progress in tackling the bug. This review also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. In the Ministry of Defence, it covered all Defence agencies, including the Meteorological Office, the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and the Hydrographic Agency. The information the hon. Member requests is available in the Departments' plans, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates, to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library of the House and on the Internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60115]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* The Ministry of Defence has had a Year 2000 programme in place since early 1996. The programme is complex, with over 20,000 computer based systems to be evaluated. Priority is being given to finding solutions to those systems that pose a high risk to defence capability, and to obtaining assurances of millennium compliance from our suppliers. Progress by the MOD and other Government Departments was reported by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to the House on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*. A further progress report will be announced in the House in the near future.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60219]

Mr. Spellar: Taskforce 2000 have correctly recognised the scale of the problem facing the Ministry of Defence and the capability of our programme managers. To counter the millennium problem we have put in place a comprehensive assessment and rectification programme, including external audit of our processes, and considerable progress has been made. We are monitoring expenditure closely and believe that our cost estimate for the programme remains realistic. The principal objective of our programme is to identify and manage any risks to Defence capability arising from the millennium problem.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly and copies of the department's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library of the House and published on the internet.

Human Rights

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which aspects of the Government's human rights policy are his Department's responsibility. [59868]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the right hon. Member to the answers given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Dept, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), on 24 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *721–22*, and by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), on 11 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *647*. The Ministry of Defence works in partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the other Government Departments who have lead responsibilities for different aspects of the Government's human rights policy. This country is an advocate of democracy and human rights the world over and the Recent Strategic Defence review indicates how my Department will continue to play its part in supporting the Government in this.

Pilots (Retention)

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to retain pilots in the Royal Air Force; what is the current average length of service of pilots in the RAF; and how many are members of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. [59400]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A number of measures to improve pilot retention have been introduced or are under consideration by the Royal Air Force. Some pilots are being invited to serve beyond their normal retirement date and others who left the Royal Air Force at optional retirement points are being invited to re-join. Trials are being conducted to assess the utility of employing former regular RAF pilots as volunteer reservists on a variety of aircraft types. The RAF has also begun a wide-ranging study to ensure that the future officer career structure is aimed at developing and retaining the best people.

The current average length of service of qualified regular RAF pilots is 12.9 years.

On 1 November 1998, 29 trained pilots were serving in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the amount which further education colleges receive for the education of college students funded under the Further Education Funding Council's regulations relative to the amount which they receive for those funded by the New Deal. [59178]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not made a detailed assessment.

Organisations wishing to deliver education and training provision in the Full-Time Education and Training (FTET) option of the New Deal for 18–24 year olds bid for contracts with the Employment Service, on the basis of competitive tendering. FE Colleges, along with other training providers, made a judgment on the level of funding they needed to deliver provision against the requirements in the New Deal specification.

Contracts have been signed for 3 years, and will be reviewed during this period.

Student Transport

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on new arrangements for transport assistance for students aged 16 years or over. [59586]

Mr. Mudie: We plan to introduce new arrangements for Further Education student support which will be fairer and better targeted from September 1999. These arrangements will be responsive to the needs of individual students, including assistance with transport, and will contribute towards our objectives of widening access and participation. We expect to make an announcement shortly.

"Partners in Europe"

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *90*, how many requests he received from teachers to update material available on the European Union prior to the production of "Partners in Europe". [59879]

Mr. Mudie: The Department for Education and Employment had received requests to revise out of date materials for some time before the UK's 1998 Presidency of the EU. These requests were fed to the Department through various consultative bodies such as the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges and the Qualification and Curriculum Authority, and in informal meetings with teachers and their representatives.

Child Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what child care provision is made available by his Department for the use of staff; what is the cost to parents of this child care; how many parents used the facilities in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what proportion of total staff used these facilities in the financial years (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98. [59726]

Mr. Mudie: The Department is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for its staff and supports a range of child care and family friendly policies which help staff to balance family and working life. We are considering how our child care and family provision could be further developed.

The Department currently supports holiday playscheme facilities on all of the Department's four headquarters sites. It also provides nursery facilities on its Runcorn and Sheffield sites. Facilities are often shared with other government organisations, in particular with the Employment Service HQ in Sheffield and with the Office for National Statistics in Runcorn.

Because on site facilities require a high level of investment, parents using Departmental child care schemes are normally required to make a contribution towards the cost, comparable to private sector schemes.

The current weekly DfEE nursery cost to parents are: Runcorn £63; Sheffield £57.

The current weekly playscheme costs to parents are: Darlington £32.50; London £40; Runcorn £40; Sheffield £32.50.

The number of parents and proportion of staff using these facilities are as set in the table.

	Number of parents	*Proportion of total staff (%)*
1996–97	290	5.8
1997–98	283	6.3

Disabled Students

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his assessment of the effect of the introduction of tuition fees and the abolition of the maintenance grant on the numbers of mature disabled students entering further and higher education; and if he will make a statement. [59644]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* Numbers of disabled applicants to higher education have held up well. The overall number of disabled applicants to higher education in universities and colleges this year has fallen by less than 1 per cent. from 1997's very high figure and is higher than the figure for 1996. The number of mature disabled applicants in 1998 has fallen by around 5 per cent. compared with 1997, which saw a late surge in applicants. This is relatively smaller than the fall in the corresponding number of mature applicants as a whole, which is attributable largely to demographic reasons and to

the increase in the number of potential applicants who already have HE qualifications. To encourage disabled students we have abolished the means test for Disabled Students' Allowances and increased the amounts available through each such Allowance.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the proportion of his Department's computer systems which will be millennium compliant on 1 April 1999. [58847]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* According to current plans 91 per cent. of the Department's business critical computer systems will have been fully tested, corrected and put back into use by 1 April 1999. The remainder will be corrected and in service by 30 September 1999. The target date for the completion of work on non-business critical computer systems is 31 October 1999.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible arising from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60073]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to him on 18 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *253*. That answer outlined the plans in the Department, including its partner organisations in the wider education and employment sector, to ensure that services do not suffer material disruption as a result of the millennium date change issue. He will wish to note that good progress has subsequently been made in implementing these plans, with all milestones having been achieved.

He will also wish to note that no further problems or issues have either arisen or been identified since the earlier answer was provided last year.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement; [60072]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [60074]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government departments and agencies progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of departments' plans which have been published in the Library of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be placed in the Library of the House and on the internet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60075]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* The Department has a large number of business processes. Each is being identified and assessed as part of the Year 2000 programme. Outline contingency plans for key services will be completed by January 1999. DfEE's Year 2000 Programme Board has also recently considered a Millennium Operating Regime which will form part of the overall contingency planning arrangements. This approach focuses particular attention on those risks which could impact directly on the services provided to members of the public. In my Department, these are provided by the Employment Service.

The Department has also completed an initial assessment of the state of preparedness of our many partner organisations in the wider eduction and employment sector. The risks in this wider sector are currently being identified and assessed. Some of our partner organisations have already developed contingency plans to minimise the threat of disruption. Where appropriate, other partner organisations will be encouraged to do likewise.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60215]

Mr. Mudie: A key element of the approach adopted by my Department to the Year 2000 date change is to subject its plans and processes to external audit. I welcome the assessment by Task Force 2000 which endorses the views of earlier audits and confirms that my Department is making good progress.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the Department for Education and Employments' latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library of the House and published on the internet.

National Textile Training Organisation

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received regarding the establishment of a unified national textile training organisation. [60183]

Mr. Mudie: I have received one representation from the Transport and General Workers Union. The National Textile Training Organisation has submitted a bid for recognition as a National Training Organisation. As my hon. Friend is aware, the Recognition Process involves a rigorous analysis of an organisation's capacity to meet the criteria. The National Textile Training Organisation has yet to persuade officials that their bid is strong enough for submission to the Recognition Panel but discussions are continuing.

University for Industry

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the University for Industry will offer *(a)* courses and *(b)* places for trade union members. [60085]

Mr. Mudie: The University for Industry will be launched nationally in the year 2000. It will not be a direct learning provider but will rather act as a broker of learning opportunities. The full details of the range of provision with which it will connect learners are being developed, but initial priorities will include: information and communication technology; basic skills, management skills; and the specific industrial sectors of automotive components, the multimedia, environmental technology and the distributive and retail trades.

The University for Industry's activities will be directed at the widest possible range of individuals and organisations. Trade Unions should benefit from the greater and more flexible access to learning available for their members and will have a very important role to play in the University for Industry's success. A number of discussions have already been held between the TUC, officials of the University for Industry Division of the DfEE and the member of the Ufl transition team to explore how this might be taken forward.

School Meals

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local education authorities have *(a)* devolved provision of school meals to individual schools, *(b)* contracted with private sector providers for the supply of school meals and *(c)* have done neither *(a)* nor (b). [59192]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* This information is not held centrally. Some local education authorities, for example Islington and Lambeth, are known to have already delegated school meals funding to schools, and others allow individual schools to request funding. Authorities were required under the Local Government Act 1988 to put school catering contracts out to tender, and as a result of doing so, some have contracted with private sector providers.

Access to Work

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *137*, concerning access to work, what assessment he has made of the potential entitlement of disabled members of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly to support under the Access to Work scheme. [60299]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Access to Work provides help for disabled people in or about to start paid employment. It is designed to encourage employers to take on or retain disabled people by meeting some or all of the extra costs resulting from disability. The aim is to help disabled people in activities from which they earn their living. Disabled members of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly may be eligible for Access to Work support if their activities constitute paid employment.

I recently announced a new £30 million fund to help, over 3 years, disabled people who want to work. £12 million of this will boost the Action to Work programme, providing help with work costs for an extra 4,000 disabled people.

Human Rights

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which aspects of the Government's human rights policy are his Department's responsibility. [59869]

Ms Hodge: This Government are committed to promoting human rights at home and abroad. The Human Rights Act 1998 will increase the enforceability of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). My Department has particular responsibility for Article 2 of the first Protocol of the ECHR, which concerns the right to education, and for human rights at work as covered by the International Labour Organisation.

National Child Care Strategy

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will publish a summary of responses to the Green Paper on the National Childcare Strategy, Meeting the Childcare Challenge. [60662]

Ms Hodge: A summary of responses to the Green Paper 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' is being published today. Copies have been placed in the Library and are available in the Vote and Printed Paper offices. We are grateful to everyone who took the time and trouble to respond to the Green Paper, which we issued in May.

We received over 600 responses to the consultation from a wide range of interests. Our proposals for meeting the needs of children and families clearly struck a chord with many people. Making a success of the Strategy depends on the commitment of a wide range of partners, so I was delighted with the overwhelming support we received.

Competitive Bidding

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many bids were *(a)* received and *(b)* successful in each local education authority for each competitive bidding process launched and managed by his Department since May 1997; [59195]

(2) how many of his Department's initiatives announced to date for the years 1998–99 and 1999–2000 include competitive bidding by *(a)* local education authorities, *(b)* education action zones and *(c)* others. [59196]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Details of the number of competitive bids submitted by local education authorities since May 1997, along with the number that were successful are given in tables that have been placed in the Library of the House. For 1998–99 there were 20 initiatives involving competitive bidding from local education authorities, which could include bids from education action zones. For 1999–2000 the equivalent figure is 14. Information on the number of competitive bids from other bodies is not held centrally.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Edgar Fernandes Case

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans ministers in his Department have to *(a)* visit Turkey and *(b)* discuss the case of Edgar Fernandes with the Turkish authorities. [59541]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 29 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *271*, which set out the discussions my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State had with officials during her visit to Turkey in September. I will be visiting Turkey as part of a Trade Mission from 18–19 November. I have been briefed on this case. There are no plans for any other Ministers to visit Turkey at this time.

Youth for Europe

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the interpretation of the objectives of the Youth for Europe programme (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in the rest of the European Union. [60005]

Ms Quin: The objectives of the Youth for Europe III programme, as set out in Decision No. 818/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995, apply throughout the EU. We fully support them. The programme is due to end on 31 December 1999 and negotiations on a follow up programme are at an advanced stage.

EU Documents

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* the policy on and *(b)* the extent of the practice of the destruction of European Union documents. [60001]

Ms Quin: The policy on archiving historical documents is laid down in Council Regulation (EEC/EURATOM) No. 354/83 of 1 February 1983. Criteria for what constitutes an historical document are laid down by each institution. All official, numbered Council and Commission documents are kept indefinitely. Descriptions of the policy and of its implementation are included in "Archives in the European Union (1994)" and "Guide to the archives of the Member States' Foreign Ministries and European institutions (1996)", both published by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Cardiff Summit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent from public funds on the provision of gifts distributed to journalists at the Cardiff summit. [59999]

Ms Quin: None. All promotional items/gifts for the press were provided by companies and organisations based in Wales.

Palestine

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy to assist the nations concerned to meet the 4 May deadline for the international recognition of the state of Palestine. [59893]

Mr. Fatchett: The Government's policy on this issue is clear. We, in line with EU partners, support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, not excluding the option of a state. Palestinian statehood is an issue for final status negotiations. We hope both sides will concentrate their efforts on implementation of the Wye River Memorandum, which calls for the immediate resumption of final status talks aimed at completion before 4 May. We will do our utmost, both bilaterally and within the EU, to help both sides implement this agreement and assist the negotiations between the parties on final status issues.

Iran

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Baha'is in Iran. [60174]

Mr. Fatchett: We have taken the opportunity provided by meetings with Senior Iranian officials to express our serious disquiet about the treatment of the Baha'i community. Persecution of individuals on religious grounds is totally unacceptable. The May United Nations Commission on Human Rights resolution reaffirmed international concern about their situation. In early October, through our contracts with the UK Baha'i community, we became aware that death sentences on two Iranian Baha'is, Mr. Dhabihi-Muqaddam and Mr. Najafabadi, had recently been confirmed. On 4 October, we and our partners in the EU troika (Austrian Presidency and Germany) pressed the Iranian authorities not to carry out these two death sentences. We were told that the sentences were still subject to appeal and that executions were not imminent.

We are also aware, through our contracts with the Baha'i community in the UK, of a further wave of arrests of Baha'is across Iran around the end of September. These seem to have been directed primarily at teachers engaged in distance learning within the Baha'i community. Most of those concerned appear to have been released shortly after arrest but had to surrender property ownership deeds as a form of bail.

We will continue to monitor the situation carefully with our EU partners. We will take further action as necessary. In particular, we will continue to press the Iranians for more transparency about judicial process in these and other human rights cases.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of Diego Garcia as a base for a possible attack on Iraq. [60160]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* The US authorities sought our agreement, in advance, for the use of facilities in Diego Garcia for US aircraft in connection with the Gulf crisis. It was given.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy that UNSCOM has to certify that Iraq has destroyed its weapons of mass destruction before UN sanctions on Iraq can be lifted. [60278]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: United Nations Security Council Resolution (SCR) 687 of April 1991 obliges Iraq to accept the destruction of its weapons of mass destruction and to undertake not to develop such weapons in the future. The United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are the organisations tasked by the Security Council with overseeing these processes. Paragraph 22 of SCR 687 provides for the embargo on Iraqi exports to remain in force until the Security Council is satisfied that the requirements of SCR 687 have been fulfilled.

Burma

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had about human rights violations in Burma. [59606]

Mr. Fatchett: The question of Burma's human rights record over the last six months was discussed at the General Affairs Council on 26 October, which agreed a strengthening of the EU Common Position. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary also raised Burma when he discussed human rights issues with the new German Foreign Minister Joseph Fischer on 29 October.

The UK co-sponsored the [illegible] General Assembly resolution tabled on Burma last week. I also recently convened a meeting in Kent for senior policy-makers of several countries to build international consensus on Burma.

Arms Transfers

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the information the Government have submitted to the United Nations since 1 May 1997 for entry on the UN Register of Conventional Arms Transfers. [60277]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Copies of the UK's 1997 and 1998 returns to the UN Register of Conventional Arms were placed in Library at the time of their submission to the UN.

Arms Sales

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the extent of the information he is willing to make available to the House on arms exports from the UK, with particular reference to *(a)* the degree of detailed description of arms, *(b)* information about numbers of individual weapons and weapons systems exported, *(c)* information on the countries of destination and *(d)* information on dates of export; and if he will make a statement. [60311]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *149*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he plans to introduce to assist small and medium manufacturing firms in the West Midlands to improve productivity and to innovate. [58844]

Mrs. Roche: The Government's plans to enhance the competitiveness of firms of all sizes throughout the country will be set out in the forthcoming Competitiveness White Paper.

Inward Investment (West Midlands)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to encourage inward investment projects in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* the West Midlands [59543]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The Department's Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB) is giving grant support totalling £1.3 million to West Midlands Development Agency (WMDA) for the promotion of inward investment into the whole of the West Midlands working with their local partners who support their activities and ensure that sites and premises attractive to inward investors are available.

Millennium Experience

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to produce an official history of the Millennium Experience; and if he will make a statement. [60033]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company are considering a number of publications on the Millennium Experience project, including an official history.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those sponsors who have signed irrevocable contracts with the New Millennium Experience Company for *(a)* zones of the Dome and *(b)* national programme stands. [59671]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), 27 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *129–30*.

All the individual sponsorship packages which have been announced by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) are subject to the full commitment of the sponsor companies at Board level. The terms of the binding contracts on the detailed obligations of each part are at various stages of resolution and final signatures are imminent on several of them. Meanwhile all physical and

other time critical work on the Millennium Experience is progressing on the basis of the Board commitments on both sides.

Hairdressing Trainees

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the position of trainees in the hairdressing industry and the application of the minimum wage. [60189]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have received a number of representations from hairdressing organisations about the application of the national minimum wage.

Intellectual Property Rights

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what mechanisms his Department has for helping British inventors protect intellectual property rights which may have been infringed abroad. [60173]

Dr. Howells: Intellectual property rights are, in the main, private rights and it is for the owners to assert them both in the UK and abroad. However, officials in my Department work closely with UK industry to resolve general problems over enforcement of rights abroad. This includes work with industry organisations such as the Anti-Counterfeiting Group which provides useful advice and can act as a facilitator for collective action. Similarly, individual sector groups such as trade associations might also provide practical guidance and support.

If there is evidence that UK rights holders are having general difficulty enforcing rights abroad then a mechanism for addressing this is provided by TRIPS (the WTO Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) which amongst other things obliges member states to provide effective remedial action for aggrieved rights holders. Where criminal sanctions are also involved then these must act as a deterrent. A Council for TRIPS monitors the operation of the agreement and Governments' compliance with it and failure to abide by the agreement can give rise to the WTO dispute settlement procedure.

"Britain in Europe"

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contacts he had with the sponsors of the booklet Britain in Europe in order to facilitate its publication. [60002]

Mr. Mandelson: I have had no such contact.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1174*, if he will set out the procedures under which regional selective assistance is recovered. [59595]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The procedures are set out in Government Accounting, published by the Stationery Office.

The Department supplements this with the issue of Accounting Memoranda which give more detailed instructions and provide advice and information on internal accounting matters including standard forms. This material is not published.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60119]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Tackling the millennium bug is a major activity, presenting the normal problems of managing multiple concurrent tasks with the added dimension of limited time and dependence on suppliers and other external bodies. The programmes of work within the Department, its agencies and sponsored public bodies have been designed to take account of these factors as far as possible and no significant additional problems have been encountered. Priority areas for remedial work are those systems necessary to support critical activities within the organisations concerned.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60226]

Mrs. Roche: The DTI welcomes informed comment on its work in tackling the Year 2000 problem. The assessment referred to raised a number of points in respect of this department:

> Cost increase: It became clear during this year that more work would be required than expected when the original cost estimate was made in 1996. The likely increase was mentioned in our June return.
>
> Increased number of embedded systems: Audit work in this area will not be complete until the end of December. We have found more embedded items in some systems than originally thought.
>
> Progress on critical IT systems: As mentioned above, it has become clear that more work than originally anticipated will be needed, especially in relation to our main IT infrastructure. Nevertheless we remain on target to meet our declared aim of ensuring that critical IT systems are compliant by April 1999.

The report also comments on a lack of information in returns from some of the Department's Next Steps Agencies and sponsored organisations. The organisations concerned are making energetic progress on their programmes. Future returns will seek to provide a further understanding of their work.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of DTI's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library of the House and published on the internet.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the internal audit of his Department's progress and plans for tackling the millennium bug to be completed; and if he will place a copy of it in the Library. [60206]

Mrs. Roche: Reports from this work are expected to be completed by the end of next month. It is not normal practice to publish these internal management reports but the DTI will, of course, continue to provide quarterly reports on its progress, including the results of this audit work when they are available. Those progress reports will continue to be placed in the Library and published on the internet.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons his Department's September quarterly returns on progress in dealing with the impact of the millennium bug on business-critical systems shows a lower percentage coverage than in the June quarterly return. [60207]

Mrs. Roche: Both the June and September returns showed that DTI had completed the inventory work for business critical systems. Our response to a separate question which asked about inventory and audit work, a wider category of activity, reported that 5 per cent. would not be completed until the fourth quarter of 1998.

At the time of compiling the June return we predicted that audit work would be complete by the end of June. However, by the time the September report was compiled it was clear that additional audit work would be needed, particularly in relation to our main IT infrastructure.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance including the embedded chip problem after 31 December 1999. [60121]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* The DTI has high level plans for dealing with emergencies and more detailed planning is under way. Initial year 2000 contingency plans will be in place by the end of January 1999, in accordance with central guidance. These will be reviewed and refined if necessary as we approach 31 December 1999. The department has a robust programme to address millennium compliance problems connected with building operations and is also drawing up plans to ensure that its key activities can be maintained even if some embedded systems do fail.

Similarly, the Department's Next Steps Agencies, and the significant public sector bodies sponsored by the Department, already have plans which address some of the potential problems. These will be reviewed and refined as necessary during 1999.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the risks posed by gasometers, gas storage bullets and other gas storage methods at unmanned facilities in relation to the millennium bug; [60262]

(2) what assessment he has made of the preparedness of the gas industry in relation to the millennium bug; [60261]

(3) what steps he has taken to ensure that gas supplies will not be interrupted by the millennium bug; and what assessment he has made of the likelihood of interruption. [60280]

Mrs. Roche: The Department maintains regular contact with the Health and Safety Executive on potential safety hazards associated with the gas supply, and is working closely with OFGAS and Action 2000 to monitor the steps being taken by the gas industry to identify and rectify potential year 2000 problems. The industry has projects in place covering manned and unmanned facilities. Information about the steps being taken is available on the Transco Internet site.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the likelihood of interruptions to electricity supplies as a result of the millennium bug. [60279]

Mrs. Roche: The electricity industry is making extensive preparations to ensure that it will be business as usual over the period of the century date change. Each company is carrying out its own thorough assessment of its systems—in particular its critical systems—to identify and remedy any problems which might affect the security of supply before the end of 1999.

The Government, through Action 2000, have established a National Infrastructure Forum which brings together the main providers and users of the key infrastructural services. As a key part of the Forum's work, Action 2000 are leading an Independent Assessment Project to assess the state of preparedness of key services, including the electricity industry.

The electricity Regulator, OFFER, will be carrying out an independent audit of the preparations in each company. OFFER will also be co-operating with the Electricity Association in its end-to-end risk assessment for the industry. The first results of these assessments should be available in January.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry has written to the Chief Executives of the main electricity companies to make it clear that the Government expect their full co-operation in this process. He has raised the issue with the companies over the last several months and will continue to promote progress between now and the millennium.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to ensure that telecommunications services will not be interrupted by the millennium bug; and what assessment he has made of the likelihood of interruption. [60282]

Mrs. Roche: Oftel has responsibility for safeguarding the integrity of the core telecommunications network and has established a year 2000 project to monitor and assess the telecommunications industry's preparations. Oftel has taken steps to ensure that telecoms services are not disrupted over the millennium. All the main network operators are cooperating with Oftel, are taking the issue seriously, and have outlined their plans to meet this challenge. Oftel is keeping the preparations of the network operators under review.

Action 2000 is working closely with Oftel to ensure rigorous assessment programmes are in place, and has requested that Oftel add independent assessment of the key dial tone providers to a peer review of the telecom operators already being undertaken. It is difficult to make

a precise assessment of the likelihood of interruption. Oftel expects that the principal sectors of the industry will be Year 2000 compliant during the first half of 1999.

Energy Council

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Energy Council meeting on 13 November. [60653]

Mr. Battle: The Council had a full agenda of matters of interest to the United Kingdom.

I am particularly pleased to report that the Council agreed to revise the Oil Stocks Directive which requires all member States to hold contingency oil stocks. The revised Directive, which will come into force on 1 January 2000, introduces important amendments including a strengthening of support for bilateral agreements, clearer definitions and simplified reporting times. As a result of the revision, the United Kingdom, as an exporter of oil, will be eligible for a reduction in its stocking obligation. This change could lead to savings of around £10 million per annum for the British oil industry.

The Council also adopted the basic decision on the Energy Framework Programme. This multi-annual programme brings together Community spending programmes in the field of energy. In addition to the basic Decision, the Council adopted four of the specific instruments—ETAP (shared studies and analyses), SYNERGY (international co-operation), CARNOT (clean and efficient use of solid fuels), SURE (safe transport of nuclear materials and safeguards). The Council reached an informal political agreement on the remaining programmes, ALTERNER (renewable energy) and SAVE (energy conservation), pending the opinion of the European Parliament. Views on the appropriate budget varied between Member States but after negotiation a total financial reference amount of 170 mecu (£119 million) over five years was agreed, to be reviewed after three years.

Another important element of the Council concerned a number of energy and environment issues.

In response to the call made at the Cardiff European Council, the Council agreed a Report on the integration of environmental objectives into energy policy. This Report, along with those being prepared by the Transport and Agriculture Councils, will be submitted to the Vienna Council in December.

The Energy Council held an open debate on renewable energy. I stressed the need to consider the best way to support renewable energy within the internal energy market which included cross-border trade. I reported on our positive practical programme of support for renewables to achieve our 10 per cent. target. I called for national support schemes to have the key elements of competition, flexibility and transparency such as those contained in the UK's Non Fossil Fuel Obligation. Also there was the need to develop clear and transparent guidelines for the connection, operation and commercial terms for small plants. To ensure this work is taken forward, I called for the establishment of a task force bringing together the Commission and Member States to co-ordinate efforts, exchange experiences and share problems in order to keep up the momentum of promoting renewable energy sources at European level.

The Council adopted a Resolution on Energy Efficiency which complements the work on renewables. It recognises that more energy saving measures (such as minimum standards, best practice and voluntary agreements) are needed, inter alia, to enable the Community and Member States to meet their Kyoto Protocol commitments. The resolution proposes indicative energy efficiency targets and calls on the Commission to produce an action plan.

The Council received information from the Commission on the development of the single market in electricity and Trans-European energy Networks. It received a report on the Energy Charter Treaty and, in this connection, agreed a political statement on transit.

Postage Stamps

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the *(a)* names and *(b)* locations of companies with contracts to print British postage stamps; and if he will make a statement on the procedure by which these contracts are allocated. [60492]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I understand from the Post Office that contracts to print British postage stamps are held by De La Rue Security Print—Buckinghamshire, Walsall Security Print—West Midlands, House of Questa—London and John Enschede Security Print—The Netherlands.

The procedure by which these contracts are allocated is through competitive tendering in accordance with public procurement policy and international obligations under the World Trade Organisation Government Procurement Agreement where applicable.

EU Structural Funds

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the areas in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom covered by (i) Article 92(3)(a) and (ii) Article 92(3)(c) of the Treaty establishing the European Community; what was the UK position at the European General Affairs Council on 9 November on the proposed links between the above articles and the new Objective 1 and Objective 2 respectively; what areas in Scotland would be affected by such links and how; and if he will make a statement. [60508]

Mrs. Roche: Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom covered under Article 92(3)(a). Detailed coverage of the areas covered under Article 92(3)(c) is set out in Statutory Instrument Number 1877, Industrial Development—the Assisted Areas Order 1993, as amended by Statutory Instrument Number 1894, Assisted Areas (Amendment) Order 1993. Copies of both are in the Library of the House.

The Government's position at the European General Affairs Council on 9 November was unchanged from our previous position. We believe that state aids and structural funds are designed for different purposes, and therefore consistency should not be imposed at either Objective 1 or Objective 2 level.

The review of the Assisted Areas and of the Structural Funds are both continuing. It is, therefore, impossible to predict with any certainty what the impact is likely to be for any part of the United Kingdom.

EU Late Payment

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the total sum outstanding to British companies as a result of late payment of invoices by the EU under the TACIS programme for work undertaken in the CIS. [56855]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 28 October 1998]:* The European Commission does not keep a record of outstanding payments but the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington (Ms Quin), raised the issue with the Commission in Brussels on 16 November, following up earlier action by senior officials at the Department for International Development.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking with regard to the late payment to British companies by the EU under the TACIS programme for work undertaken in the CIS. [60388]

Mrs. Roche: I am concerned about the late payment to British companies by the European Commission under the Tacis programme. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), raised the issue with the Commission in Brussels on 16 November, following up earlier action by senior officials at the Department for International Development.

European Funding (Coastal Resorts)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which coastal resorts receive assistance from *(a)* the European Regional Development Fund and *(b)* the European Social Fund. [59840]

Mrs. Roche: The list sets out the UK coastal areas eligible for European Regional Development Funding.

In addition, coastal areas are eligible for a number of EU Community Initiative programmes. In particular, the PESCA Community Initiative, which provides assistance to regions facing difficulties as a result of the decline of the fishing industry, is available in a wide range of coastal areas, including Fleetwood, Lytham St. Anne's and Whitehaven.

All areas in the UK, including coastal resorts, are eligible for European Social Funding.

United Kingdom coastal areas eligible for European Regional Development Funding

Objective 1

All coastal resorts in Northern Ireland.

All coastal resorts in West and North Scotland (from border with Strathclyde to east of Forres in Grampian, including all islands in that area and Orkney and Shetland).

All coastal resorts in Merseyside region of England (North of Southport to the Wirral).

Objective 2

West Coast of Scotland (from Strathclyde border with Dumfries and Galloway to Loch Long in Strathclyde).

East Coast of Scotland (from Arbroath to Dundee on the Firth of Tay).

East Coast of Scotland (from east of Buckhaven in Fife to west of South Queensferry in Lothian, on the Firth of Forth).

East Coast of Scotland (Musselburgh area).

West Coast of England (Kirkbride to Ulverston in Cumbria).

South Coast of England (Devonport-Plymouth area).

East Coast of England (Thanet in Kent).

East Coast of England (Cleethorpes to the end of the Humber Estuary, south side).

East Coast of England (Kingston-upon-Hull area of the Humber Estuary, north side).

East Coast of England (East of Alnwick in Northumberland to Cleveland border).

South Coast of Wales (Cydwelli in West Glamorgan to West Glamorgan border with Mid Glamorgan).

South Coast of Wales (Mid Glamorgan coast, including Porthcawl).

South Coast of Wales (West of Barry to South Glamorgan border with Gwent).

South Coast of Wales (Gwent Coast).

Objective 5b

West Coast of Scotland (from Dumfries and Galloway coast to border with Strathclyde).

North Coast of Scotland (from west of Lossiemouth to south of Peterhead).

East Coast of Scotland (Borders coast to the English border).

West Coast of England (Coastline from east of Watchet in Somerset to Land's End in Cornwall).

South Coast of England (from Land's End to Saltash in Cornwall).

South Coast of England (Short section of coast east of Salcombe, then east Devon coast to south of Paignton).

East Coast of England (Lowestoft area, East Anglia).

East Coast of England (Lincolnshire coast from border with E. Anglia to north of Mablethorpe).

East Coast of England (Yorkshire coast from Scarborough to Cleveland border).

East Coast of England (from East of Alnwick north to the Scottish Border (Berwick upon Tweed)).

North and West Coast of Wales (from Gwynedd coast to Milford Haven).

South Coast of Wales (from Milford Haven to west of Cydwelli).

Business Start-ups

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the proportion of start-up businesses in the West Midlands metropolitan district; and what measures he plans to increase the number of business start-ups. [60483]

Mrs. Roche: Although VAT registrations are not synonymous with business start-ups, the following data are often used. The VAT figures for 1994 to 1996 (the latest available) show business formation rate in the metropolitan districts to exceed those of the West Midlands region and the UK. The decline in the formation rate in the metropolitan area brought it close to the rate for the UK in 1996.

	Business Formations		
VAT registrations 1994–96	*Stock at year start*	*VAT registrations*	*Formation rate (per cent.)*
Metropolitan West Midlands			
1994	55,820	6,185	11.1
1995	55,190	5,920	10.7
1996	54,500	5,880	10.8

VAT registrations 1994–96	Business Formations: Stock at year start	VAT registrations	Formation rate (per cent.)
West Midlands Region			
1994	138,145	13,663	9.9
1995	136,594	13,289	9.7
1996	135,214	13,295	9.8
UK			
1994	1,629,235	168,240	10.3
1995	1,609,335	163,960	10.2
1996	1,600,065	168,200	10.5

Figures from Barclays Bank show business start-ups in the West Midlands region were estimated at 45,000 start-ups in 1996 and 48,000 in 1997, a seven per cent. increase.The creation of new small businesses is dependent primarily on a climate of stable, sustained economic growth. The Government have taken decisive action to establish a new framework for monetary policy to ensure economic stability. The Government are also committed to helping businesses overcome financial, regulatory and other barriers to establishment and growth. Practical help is provided by the Business Link Network in England which assists businesses of all sizes and at all stages. Further specific measures will be announced in the Department's forthcoming White Paper.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many units of Part 3 accommodation have been completed in each of the last five years in each local authority area. [59203]

Mr. Raynsford: The available data are given in the publication "Local Housing Statistics" which shows estimates of new housebuilding for the elderly and for the chronically sick and disabled. This publication gives figures for each local authority area in England, as reported to the Department by the local authority concerned.

"Local Housing Statistics" issue number 110 shows figures for 1993; number 114 covers 1994; number 118 covers 1995; number 122 covers 1996–97; and number 126 covers 1997–98.

Copies of this publication are in the Library.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the total cost of local government reorganisation in each of the last five years *(a)* in each county area and *(b)* to his Department. [58741]

Ms Armstrong: Resources in the form of Supplementary Credit Approvals (SCAs) are made available to reorganising authorities under the local government reorganisation costs scheme. The SCAs issued to each authority under the schemes for 1994–95, 1995–96, 1996–97 and the maximum amounts issued under the 1998–99 scheme are set out in the table.

The basis of the schemes for SCAs, which commenced in 1994–95 and will continue to 2000–2001, is that they are intended to assist authorities in the short term with the funding of their set up costs, until savings and receipts are realised. The borrowing covered by these approvals must be repaid over a period of ten years, under the terms of the scheme. Therefore, a true assessment of the cost, if any, of local government reorganisation will not be possible for a number of years. The Government's expectation was that, in the longer term, the benefits would offset the costs, although it is acknowledged that much depends on the approach of the individual authority for which they are accountable to their electorate.

We believe that SCAs will have covered the vast bulk of initial costs identified by authorities, under the bidding terms of the scheme, as unavoidable and arising directly from reorganisation.

Local Government reorganisation costs schemes

£000

Local authority	1994–95 outturn: Bid	Allocation	1995–96 outturn: Bid	Allocation	1996–97 outturn: Bid	Allocation
Isle of Wight Council	2,187	2,187	1,536	1,536	[1]—	0
Total	2,187	2,187	1,536	1,536	0	0
Cleveland County Council	—	—	5,726	3,169	—	—
Hartlepool Borough Council	548	548	3,727	3,200	2,530	2,350
Redcar & Cleveland Council	87	87	3,353	2,891	3,406	3,405
Middlesbrough Borough Council	194	194	2,370	2,160	4,471	2,950
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	498	498	2,947	2,947	3,951	3,450
Total for Cleveland Authorities	1,327	1,327	18,123	14,367	14,357	12,155
Avon County Council	—	—	3,098	2,910	—	—
Bristol City Council	—	—	3,128	2,719	4,369	3,600
North Somerset Council	—	—	3,197	3,197	3,119	3,100
Bath & North East Somerset Council[1]	—	—	2,783	2,783	3,404	3,404
South Gloucestershire Council[1]	—	—	2,712	2,712	3,498	3,498
Total for Avon Authorities	—	—	14,918	14,321	14,390	13,602
Humberside County Council	—	—	4,592	2,900	—	—
Kingston upon Hull Council	—	—	3,865	3,080	3.625	3,450
East Riding of Yorkshire Council[1]	—	—	4,707	3,454	8,342	8,000
North Lincolnshire Council[1]	—	—	3,296	2,992	2,919	2,919
North East Lincolnshire Council[1]	—	—	3,515	2,950	4,112	4,112
Total for Humberside Authorities	—	—	19,685	15,376	18,998	18,481

Local Government reorganisation costs schemes

£000

Local authority	1994–95 outturn Bid	1994–95 outturn Allocation	1995–96 outturn Bid	1995–96 outturn Allocation	1996–97 outturn Bid	1996–97 outturn Allocation
North Yorkshire County Council	—	—	2,055	1,400	402	402
Ryedale District Council	—	—	0	0	[2]—	0
Selby District Council	—	—	685	685	69	69
York City Council[1]	—	—	3,912	3,548	3,145	3,145
Total for North Yorkshire Authorities	—	—	6,652	5,831	3,616	3,616
Total for 1995–96 Authorities	3,514	3,514	60,914	51,231	51,361	47,854
Bedfordshire County Council	—	—	86	0	2,157	1,900
Luton Borough Council	—	—	128	0	5,014	3,680
Total for Bedfordshire Authorities	—	—	214	0	7,171	5,580
Buckinghamshire County Council	—	—	—	0	[2]—	0
Milton Keynes Borough Council	—	—	451	0	2,932	2,932
Total for Buckinghamshire Authorities	—	—	451	0	2,932	2,932
Derbyshire County Council	—	—	—	0	1,909	1,900
Derby City Council	—	—	117	0	3,651	2,850
Total for Derbyshire Authorities	—	—	117	0	5,560	4,750
Dorset County Council	—	—	—	0	[2]—	0
Bournemouth Borough Council	—	—	—	0	3,005	3,005
Poole Borough Council	—	—	411	0	3,582	3,250
Total for Dorset Authorities	—	—	411	0	6,587	6,255
Durham County Council	—	—	—	0	[2]—	0
Darlington Borough Council	—	—	237	0	4,430	4,430
Total for Durham Authorities	—	—	237	0	4,430	4,430
East Sussex County Council	—	—	—	0	2,531	1,850
Brighton & Hove Council[1]	—	—	158	0	9,172	4,800
Total for East Sussex Authorities	—	—	158	0	11,703	6,650
Hampshire County Council	—	—	—	0	3,056	2,200
Portsmouth City Council	—	—	126	0	3,502	2,950
Southampton City Council	—	—	516	0	3,982	3,050
Total for Hampshire Authorities	—	—	642	0	10,540	8,200
Leicestershire County Council	—	—	—	0	1,562	1,562
Leicester City Council	—	—	75	0	3,875	3,200
Rutland Council	—	—	—	0	998	998
Total for Leicestershire Authorities	—	—	75	0	6,435	5,760
Staffordshire County Council	—	—	—	0	5,238	2,000
Stoke on Trent City Council	—	—	147	0	4,109	2,950
Total for Staffordshire Authorities	—	—	147	0	9,347	4,950
Wiltshire County Council	—	—	28	0	1,620	1,350
Swindon Borough Council	—	—	362	0	6,323	3,000
Total for Wiltshire Authorities	—	—	390	0	7,943	4,350
Total for 1997 Authorities	—	—	2,842	0	72,684	53,857
Berkshire County Council	—	—	—	—	486	0
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	—	—	—	—	226	0
West Berkshire District Council	—	—	—	—	201	0
Reading Borough Council	—	—	—	—	150	0
Slough Borough Council	—	—	—	—	911	0
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	—	—	—	—	349	0
Wokingham District Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Total for Berkshire Authorities	—	—	—	—	2,323	0
Hereford & Worcester County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Hereford City Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Leominster District Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Malvern Hills District Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
South Herefordshire District Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
County of Herefordshire District Council(s)	—	—	—	—	—	0
Worcestershire County Council(s)	—	—	—	—	—	0
Malvern Hills District Council(s)	—	—	—	—	—	0
Total for Hereford & Worcester Authorities	—	—	—	—	0	0
Devon County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Plymouth City Council	—	—	—	—	175	0
Torbay Borough Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Total for Devon Authorities	—	—	—	—	175	0
Essex County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Southend on Sea Borough Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Thurrock Borough Council	—	—	—	—	423	0
Total for Essex Authorities	—	—	—	—	423	0
Nottinghamshire County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Nottingham City Council	—	—	—	—	468	0
Total for Nottinghamshire Authorities	—	—	—	—	468	0
Cheshire County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0

Local Government reorganisation costs schemes

£000

Local authority	1994–95 outturn Bid	1994–95 outturn Allocation	1995–96 outturn Bid	1995–96 outturn Allocation	1996–97 outturn Bid	1996–97 outturn Allocation
Halton Borough Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Warrington Borough Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Total for Cheshire Authorities	—	—	—	—	0	0
Shropshire County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Telford & Wrekin Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Total for Shropshire Authorities	—	—	—	—	0	0
Kent County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Gillingham Borough Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Rochester City Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Medway Council(s)	—	—	—	—	—	0
Total for Kent Authorities	—	—	—	—	0	0
Cambridgeshire County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Peterborough City Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Total for Cambridgeshire Authorities	—	—	—	—	0	0
Lancashire County Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	—	—	—	—	348	0
Blackpool Borough Council	—	—	—	—	[2]—	0
Total for Lancashire Authorities	—	—	—	—	348	0
Total for 1998 Authorities	—	—	—	—	3,737	0
Grand Total	3,514	3,514	63,756	51,231	127,746	101,711

Local Government reorganisation costs schemes

£000

Local authority	1997–98 outturn Bid	1997–98 outturn Allocation	1998–99 mid year review Bid	1998–99 mid year review Allocation	Totals to date Bid	Totals to date Allocation
Isle of Wight Council	[2]—	0	—	—	3,723	3,723
Total	0	0	0	0	3,723	3,723
Cleveland County Council	—	—	—	—	5,726	3,169
Hartlepool Borough Council	1,462	1,400	1,178	720	9,445	8,218
Redcar & Cleveland Council	1,141	1,141	1,660	1,000	9,646	8,524
Middlesbrough Borough Council	1,968	1,800	2,286	2,284	11,289	9,388
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	2,135	1,800	1,796	1,646	11,327	10,341
Total for Cleveland Authorities	6,607	6,141	6,920	5,650	47,433	39,640
Avon County Council	—	—	—	—	3,098	2,910
Bristol City Council	1,095	1,095	1,268	1,268	9,860	8,682
North Somerset Council	1,188	1,030	652	652	8,156	7,979
Bath & North East Somerset Council[1]	1,674	1,674	1,490	1,280	9,351	9,141
South Gloucestershire Council[1]	1,194	1,194	830	830	8,234	8,234
Total for Avon Authorities	5,151	4,993	4,240	4,030	38,699	36,946
Humberside County Council	—	—	—	—	4,592	2,900
Kingston upon Hull Council	4,505	2,300	2,335	1,823	14,330	10,653
East Riding of Yorkshire Council[1]	1,989	1,989	4,259	4,259	19,297	17,702
North Lincolnshire Council[1]	2,086	1,800	3,288	3,288	11,499	10,999
North East Lincolnshire Council[1]	2,19[illegible]	1,900	2,246	1,853	11,871	10,815
Total for Humberside Authorities	10,778	7,989	12,128	11,223	61,589	53,069
North Yorkshire County Council	—	—	—	—	2,457	1,802
Ryedale District Council	—	—	—	—	0	0
Selby District Council	—	—	—	—	754	754
York City Council[1]	[2]—	0	[2]—	0	7,057	6,691
Total for North Yorkshire Authorities	0	0	0	0	10,268	9,247
Total for 1995–96 Authorities	22,635	19,123	23,288	20,903	161,712	142,625
Bedfordshire County Council	971	971	—	—	3,214	2,871
Luton Borough Council	3,667	3,575	1,973	1,973	10,782	9,228
Total for Bedfordshire Authorities	4,638	4,546	1,973	1,973	13,996	12,099
Buckinghamshire County Council	[2]—	0	—	—	0	0
Milton Keynes Borough Council	3,000	3,000	2,918	2,250	9,301	8,182
Total for Buckinghamshire Authorities	3,000	3,000	2,918	2,250	9,301	8,182
Derbyshire County Council	575	575	—	—	2,484	2,475
Derby City Council	2,950	2,950	1,835	1,602	8,553	7,402
Total for Derbyshire Authorities	3,525	3,525	1,835	1,602	11,037	9,877
Dorset County Council	[2]—	0	—	—	0	0
Bournemouth Borough Council	2,900	2,900	828	650	6,733	6,555
Poole Borough Council	2,665	2,665	1,100	1,100	7,758	7,015
Total for Dorset Authorities	5,565	5,565	1,928	1,750	14,491	13,570
Durham County Council	[2]—	0	—	—	0	0
Darlington Borough Council	2,317	2,317	1,478	1,193	8,462	7,940
Total for Durham Authorities	2,317	2,317	1,478	1,193	8,462	7,940

Local Government reorganisation costs schemes

£000

Local authority	1997–98 outturn Bid	1997–98 outturn Allocation	1998–99 mid year review Bid	1998–99 mid year review Allocation	Totals to date Bid	Totals to date Allocation
East Sussex County Council	1,575	1,575	—	—	4,106	3,425
Brighton & Hove Council[1]	4,825	4,000	1,775	1,407	15,930	10,207
Total for East Sussex Authorities	6,400	5,575	1,775	1,407	20,036	13,632
Hampshire County Council	2,350	2,350	—	—	5,406	4,550
Portsmouth City Council	2,601	2,600	1,603	1,603	7,832	7,153
Southampton City Council	3,049	3,049	3,976	3,185	11,523	9,284
Total for Hampshire Authorities	8,000	7,999	5,579	4,788	24,761	20,987
Leicestershire County Council	1,369	1,145	—	—	2,931	2,707
Leicester City Council	3,547	3,100	[2]—	0	7,497	6,300
Rutland Council	1,173	1,170	1,165	1,065	3,336	3,233
Total for Leicestershire Authorities	6,089	5,415	1,165	1,065	13,764	12,240
Staffordshire County Council	654	654	—	—	5,892	2,654
Stoke on Trent City Council	3,518	3,378	1,549	1,348	9,323	7,676
Total for Staffordshire Authorities	4,172	4,032	1,549	1,348	15,215	10,330
Wiltshire County Council	400	400	—	—	2,048	1,750
Swindon Borough Council	3,339	2,870	742	742	10,708	5,612
Total for Wiltshire Authorities	3,739	3,270	742	742	12,814	8,362
Total for 1997 Authorities	47,648	45,244	20,942	18,118	143,877	117,219
Berkshire County Council	7,093	6,500	—	—	7,579	6,500
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	0	0	0	0	226	0
West Berkshire District Council	0	0	0	0	201	0
Reading Borough Council	5,025	4,900	7,461	3,281	12,636	8,181
Slough Borough Council	6,169	5,900	3,380	2,781	10,460	8,681
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	0	0	0	0	349	0
Wokingham District Council	5,019	4,900	2,300	2,262	7,319	7,162
Total for Berkshire Authorities	23,306	22,200	13,141	8,324	38,770	30,524
Hereford & Worcester County Council	2,300	2,300	—	—	2,300	2,300
Hereford City Council	383	383	—	—	383	383
Leominster District Council	266	266	—	—	266	266
Malvern Hills District Council	0	0	—	—	0	0
South Herefordshire District Council	481	481	—	—	481	481
County of Herefordshire District Council(s)	2,670	2,670	6,391	5,155	9,061	7,825
Worcestershire County Council(s)	1,948	1,948	2,720	2,250	4,668	4,198
Malvern Hills District Council(s)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total for Hereford & Worcester Authorities	8,048	8,048	9,111	7,405	17,159	15,453
Devon County Council	1,812	1,812	942	765	2,754	2,577
Plymouth City Council	2,900	2,900	9,450	9,450	12,525	12,350
Torbay Borough Council	3,504	3,500	6,397	6,396	9,901	9,896
Total for Devon Authorities	8,216	8,212	16,789	15,611	25,180	24,823
Essex County Council	[2]—	—	2,683	2,683	2,683	2,683
Southend on Sea Borough Council	4,496	4,496	3,301	2,690	7,799	7,188
Thurrock Borough Council	2,481	2,481	3,502	3,067	6,406	5,548
Total for Essex Authorities	6,979	6,979	9,486	8,440	16,888	15,419
Nottinghamshire County Council	561	561	5,858	4,534	6,519	5,095
Nottingham City Council	3,710	3,700	4,430	3,920	8,608	7,620
Total for Nottinghamshire Authorities	4,271	4,261	10,388	8,454	15,127	12,715
Cheshire County Council	2,169	2,169	3,099	2,217	5,268	4,386
Halton Borough Council	2,825	2,825	3,004	2,832	5,829	5,857
Warrington Borough Council	3,321	3,320	3,013	2,934	6,334	6,254
Total for Cheshire Authorities	8,315	8,314	9,116	7,983	17,431	16,297
Shropshire County Council	1,625	1,544	1,540	994	3,165	2,538
Telford & Wrekin Council	3,870	3,835	4,788	4,143	8,658	7,978
Total for Shropshire Authorities	5,495	5,379	6,328	5,137	11,823	10,516
Kent County Council	3,200	3,200	884	752	4,084	3,952
Gillingham Borough Council	1,108	1,108	—	—	1,108	1,108
Rochester City Council	0	0	—	—	0	0
Medway Council(s)	3,262	3,260	6,455	5,674	9,717	8,934
Total for Kent Authorities	7,570	7,568	7,339	6,426	14,909	13,994
Cambridgeshire County Council	1,207	1,207	250	250	1,457	1,457
Peterborough City Council	3,400	3,400	2,061	2,061	5,461	5,461
Total for Cambridgeshire Authorities	4,607	4,607	2,311	2,311	6,918	6,918
Lancashire County Council	2,800	2,800	1,533	1,465	4,333	4,265
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	3,597	3,590	3,607	3,349	7,552	6,939
Blackpool Borough Council	5,423	5,200	2,509	3,188	8,932	8,388
Total for Lancashire Authorities	11,820	11,590	8,649	8,002	20,817	19,592
Total for 1998 Authorities	88,627	87,158	92,658	79,093	185,022	166,251
Grand Total	158,707	151,525	136,888	118,114	490,611	426,095

[1] Includes allocations to predecessor authorities

[2] No bid

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from the Minister for Energy in the Republic of Ireland concerning the commissioning of the mixed oxide plant at Sellafield; and what response he has made. [59211]

Mr. Meale: Mr. Jacob has written to my Department raising concerns about the Environment Agency's proposed decisions on the Sellafield discharge authorisations and the operation of the Mixed-Oxide Plant at Sellafield. Requests have been made to Ministers to call in the applications for their own determination. In reply, we are assuring Mr. Jacob that his concerns and, indeed, all representations on the applications, are being carefully considered. My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will announce their decisions as soon as they are able to do so.

London Taxis ("Knowledge" Test)

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to allow the Public Carriage Office to charge individuals undertaking the knowledge of London test. [59487]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The matter is under consideration.

Biological Diversity Convention

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the Government's objectives are in the negotiation of the Biosafety Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity. [59651]

Mr. Meale: The Government's objective in the negotiation of the Biosafety Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity is to secure a broad protocol covering the transboundary movements of all living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology which may have an adverse effect on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or human health. Importing countries should have adequate information and capacity to be able to make informed decisions about how to control transboundary movements of such organisms. For this reason, the Government are pressing in the negotiations for effective advance informed agreement procedures, in line with the precautionary principle, extensive information exchange, provisions on risk assessment, and capacity building. There should be clear labelling of LMOs, consistent with our domestic and European Community policy on labelling of genetically modified organisms. The Government will work towards an instrument that will attract a maximum number of countries to ratify it. In this way, the Biosafety Protocol and the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology, should provide a sound international framework for safety in biotechnology.

Reed Beds

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what evaluation he has made of the use of reed beds in filtering manufacturing effluent; and what steps he is taking to promote such use. [59652]

Mr. Meale: None. The assessment of the suitability of using reed beds as a means of filtering manufacturing effluent is essentially for the industry or body concerned. Monitoring of effluent treated in this way is a matter for the sewerage undertaker or the Environment Agency depending upon where it is eventually discharged.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the disposal of *(a)* nuclear waste and *(b)* toxic waste from Windscale/Sellafield, and on recent reports that such materials were tipped into the Irish Sea off Holyhead. [59697]

Mr. Meale: I am aware of recent reports suggesting that toxic and radioactive waste from Windscale were dumped in the Irish Sea off Holyhead in the 1950s and early 1960s. Similar reports appeared in the press last year but extensive searches by Government Departments of archive records relating to sea dumping of radioactive waste did not identify any evidence to support them. However, as part of that research, the Ministry of Defence confirmed that radioactive miss-distance indicators were disposed of in Holyhead Deep in 1974. Details of those disposals were announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, last year.

An independent assessment of the disposals, conducted by the National Radiological Protection Board, confirmed that they were of no radiological significance. A copy of the NRPB report on the disposals was placed in the Library of the House in November 1997. The Ministry of Defence is still undertaking record searches for other previously unreported sea dumpings of radioactive waste and will be announcing the results of that research in due course.

Some reports have claimed that the waste in question arose from the Windscale Pile 1 fire which occurred in 1957. I understand that the material resulting from the fire was, in fact, retained on site and either processed, stored or disposed of there. The Government are not aware of any of the material being sent for disposal at sea, although it is possible that very small quantities of fuel and isotopes could have been dispatched to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority site at Harwell for analysis, and the residues disposed of by authorised sea disposal routes.

Water Companies

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the current return on capital employed in the privatised water industries. [59786]

Mr. Meale: In 1997–98, the Director General of Water Services has reported that the overall return before tax on the regulatory capital value of the water undertakers, both the privatised water and sewerage companies and the private sector water supply companies, was 10.1 per cent. Explanation of the basis of this figure and information on the returns of each individual company are published by the Director General of Water Services in his annual

"Report on the financial performance and capital investment of the water companies in England and Wales", copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the average profits of privatised water companies over the past 10 years. [59577]

Mr. Meale: The table shows the aggregate profits before tax of the water undertakers, both the privatised water and sewerage companies and the private sector water supply companies, in each of the years since privatisation. Information on the profits of each individual company is published by the Director General of Water Services in his annual "Report on the financial performance and capital investment of the water companies in England and Wales", copies of which are in the Library.

Current cost (1997–98 prices) profits before tax

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	1,308
1991–92	1,407
1992–93	1,503
1993–94	1,581
1994–95	1,845
1995–96	1,917
1996–97	2,016
1997–98	2,059

National Bus Company Pension Scheme

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects his Department's investigation into the National Bus Company pension schemes to be concluded. [60098]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department is not carrying out any investigation into the National Bus Company pension schemes. However, the Department's lawyers have recently opened discussions with lawyers for the NBC pensions trustees on achieving a just out-of-court settlement to the trustees' claim for return of the pension surplus paid over following NBC's privatisation.

High priority is being given to achieving as soon as possible a conclusion to these discussions which is satisfactory to all concerned.

Isle of Wight

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the local government boundaries commission's proposals for the Isle of Wight in relation to the unitary council elections of 2001. [60040]

Mr. Raynsford: We have consulted on a draft Order to give effect to the Local Government Commission for England's proposals for the Isle of Wight. Having considered the representations received, our current intention remains to make the Order to take effect from the usual election day in 2001.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when the Highways Agency will hand over responsibility for trunk roads to county councils; [59891]

(2) how soon standard spending assessments will be adjusted to take account of additional responsibility placed on county councils of maintaining, repairing and improving trunk roads. [59892]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The transfer of non-core trunk roads to local highway authorities is expected to take some years to complete. It is intended that standard spending assessments will be adjusted to coincide with actual transfers. We published on 11 November a paper setting out how it is planned to take forward the detrunking proposals and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Social Housing (Birmingham)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the capital investment was in publicly owned and other social housing at 1994–95 prices in the Birmingham Metropolitan District in *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1984–85, *(c)* 1989–90 and *(d)* each of the subsequent years; and what is the amount planned for 1999–2000. [60252]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has not been able to produce all the figures requested in the time available. I will write shortly to my hon. Friend setting out those figures which are available for the years given and place a copy of the information in the Library.

BSG Property Services

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in relation to BSG Property Services Limited of Everton, Bedfordshire, and the effects of Schedule 1 to the Housing Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [60186]

Mr. Raynsford: I will write to the right hon. and learned Member, and place a copy of my response in the Library.

Coastal Resorts

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which coastal resorts have received funding from the Single Regeneration Budget. [59839]

Mr. Meale: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *188*, to the very similar question from my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell).

Housing Management CCT

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to allow local authorities an exemption from housing management CCT, providing best value arrangements are in place. [60177]

Mr. Raynsford: None. Exemptions from CCT, including housing management, have been given to selected authorities piloting best value. For all other authorities, changes were made to CCT regulations and guidance in December 1997 to reduce the prescriptive element of CCT and to enable authorities to adopt best value practices consistent with current legislation.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which standard spending assessments take sparsity of population into account when calculating revenue support grants. [60248]

Ms Armstrong: The sparsity allowance is included in the following SSA formulae; Education—Primary, Secondary, post-16 and Under 5; Police; and Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services at district and county levels.

Climate Change

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the current reviews and consultations which are being undertaken by his Department on climate change and sustainable development. [59993]

Mr. Meale: A consultation on policy options for meeting the UK's climate change targets began on 26 October 1998 and will end on 12 February 1999. This consultation will eventually lead to the development of a new UK climate change programme in good time for ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. The Government's consultation on the revision of the 1994 UK sustainable development strategy was held between 4 February and 29 May 1998. A series of consultation documents on Tourism, Business, Construction, Biodiversity and Forestry were also published as supplements to the main consultation paper "Opportunities for Change". The Government are aiming to publish a revised sustainable development strategy in early 1999.

Fire and Rescue Services

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will assess the applicability of the proposed new models of local authority leadership to fire and rescue authorities; and if he will make a statement. [60193]

Mr. Raynsford: As stated in the White Paper "Modern Local Government—In Touch with the People" (Cm 4014), we will consult widely before putting any new models in place. Such consultation will include consideration of the applicability of any model to single service authorities, including metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities and combined fire authorities.

Landfill Tax

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of the Economic Secretary to the Treasury of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *100*, when his Department proposes to issue exemptions from landfill tax; and if he will make a statement. [59927]

Mr. Meale: Exemptions to the landfill tax were considered in the last budget. A recommendation was made for the introduction of an exemption for the restoration of landfill sites and the backfilling of quarries with effect from 1 October 1999. DETR is committed to this recommendation which is currently being developed in discussion with other Government Departments. No further exemptions are being considered at this time.

Water Supplies (Millennium Bug)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to ensure that water supplies will not be interrupted by the millennium bug; and what assessment he has made of the likelihood of interruption. [60281]

Mr. Meale: The Director General of Water Services has been asked to take the lead in monitoring the water industry's progress in ensuring that potential millennium problems are minimised. A Water Regulators Group, which includes representatives from the Drinking Water Inspectorate, Environment Agency, Health and Safety Executive, Action 2000 and my Department, has been set up under the chairmanship of OFWAT. OFWAT have commissioned consultants to investigate the work each water company is doing and to visit a number of companies. Their report was published on 22 October. It is clear that water companies are making progress but there is still some work to be done and OFWAT will ensure that water companies keep up the momentum.

Water Charging

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will announce the results of the consultation exercise held earlier this year on water charging in England and Wales. [60595]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are today publishing our response to the consultation exercise we undertook earlier this year on water charging in England and Wales, "Water Charging in England and Wales: Government Decisions following Consultation".

The driving principles behind the Government's policy are to deliver a system which provides for fair and affordable water charges, particularly for vulnerable customers, while ensuring the sustainable use of water supplies and protection of the aquatic environment. Increased customer choice is an essential ingredient.

When we consulted earlier this year, we put forward a number of policy options. The response to consultation confirms our proposals in a number of areas:

i. Those who currently pay on an unmeasured basis and use water only for essential domestic purposes should be able to continue to pay on this basis in their current home.

ii. We propose to remove the threat of disconnection for non-payment for homes, schools and hospitals.

iii. We propose that domestic customers who currently pay on an unmeasured basis should be able to have a meter fitted, free of charge. Those who request a meter should have the option of reverting to an unmeasured charge within 12 months where that suits their needs.

iv. We propose targeted protection for vulnerable groups with high essential water use who have to pay a measured charge and would be unduly disadvantaged by doing so.

v. We propose to remove the deadline of 31 March 2000 for the use of rateable value as a basis of water charging.

We believe that these policies will fulfil our commitments to increased customer choice, with protection for the most vulnerable groups.

Many people will continue to pay on an unmeasured charge in the future but measured charges can, in the right circumstances, encourage individual customers to use water efficiently. Our policies will ensure that those who would prefer to pay by meter will be able to do so without paying an initial installation cost. We remain firmly of the view that people using water only for essential domestic purposes in their current homes who are currently paying on an unmeasured basis should not be obliged to have their charges set by volume. Our proposals will ensure that people will have to switch to paying on a measured basis in their current homes only if they choose to do so, unless they are using water for non-essential purposes.

We believe that water is essential for life and health, and that no-one should be deprived of it simply because of an inability to pay. Our proposals will mean an end to domestic disconnections, and will ensure that no school or hospital is ever disconnected for non-payment of water bills. We will also ensure that vulnerable groups, in particular large families on low-incomes and those with medical conditions requiring higher than usual water use, are protected from high water charges in the event that they live in a metered property.

Copies of the Government's document "Water Charging in England and Wales: Government Decisions following Consultation" have been placed in the Library of the House.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the information concerning the commercial release of genetically modified crops in 1999 and 2000 will be held on a public register; and what this information will include. [60249]

Mr. Meale: Information concerning the commercial release of genetically modified crops in 1999 and 2000 will not be held on a public register. However, we anticipate that all commercial planting in 1999–2000 will be in the form of the farm-scale releases announced in the statement by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment to the House of Lords Select Committee on 21 October. Details of these releases will be published.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans there are for the disposal of the genetically modified crops grown as a result of the full-scale farm trials announced on 21 October. [60250]

Mr. Meale: For the farm-scale releases which are conducted under part C approval (marketing consent) of Directive 90/220/EEC, the crops may be used in accordance with the scope set out in the original marketing notification. For those conducted under part B approval (research purposes) the release consent will specify the method of disposal.

Countryside Access

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he plans to publish his responses to the Government's consultation process on access to the countryside before the Christmas adjournment. [60170]

Mr. Meacher: We are considering carefully responses to our consultation paper, *Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales*. We intend to publish my Department's analysis of responses and to announce our conclusions as soon as possible. I cannot say, at this stage, whether this will be before the Christmas adjournment.

Rail Ticket Prices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to ensure that rail ticket prices do not rise by more than the price of inflation. [60364]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The price of key fares—including Savers, standard singles and returns where there are no Savers and weekly seasons—is capped under the franchise agreements which govern the provision of services. From 1 January 1999, these fares may not rise by more than one percentage point below inflation. In the London area, a wider range of products is regulated, and there is an adjustment to the fares cap which provides for additional increases and decreases according to service performance. Fares which are not capped are determined commercially by train operating companies. In the last three years, average fares, both capped and uncapped, have risen by less than the value of inflation.

Aviation Fuel

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the quantity of aviation fuel sold in 1997 at United Kingdom airports. [60454]

Ms Glenda Jackson: 8.45 million tonnes of aviation fuel were uplifted in the United Kingdom in 1997. This includes fuel used by domestic and international airlines, the aircraft industry, the armed services, and for private and business flying.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the allocation of carbon emission rights on an equal per capita basis; and to what extent these were taken into account in the British negotiating position during the COP4 climate change convention in Buenos Aires. [60491]

Mr. Meale: My right hon. Friend received a number of representations concerning the allocation of carbon emission rights on an equal per capita basis, which were taken account of in establishing the UK position for the Buenos Aires Conference. Discussion of this issue took place at the Conference in the context of both emissions trading and future emission targets for all Parties.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has commissioned concerning the development of domestic tradable quotas as a means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions. [60490]

Mr. Meale: A domestic carbon trading scheme was one of the options considered by Lord Marshall in his report on economic instruments and the business use of energy, which was published on 3 November. The Government are currently considering his conclusions and recommendations and will evaluate the need for further research in that context.

Packaging Waste Regulations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce changes to the Packaging Waste Regulations. [60171]

Mr. Meale: A consultation document on the review of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997, was issued on 30 July this year and the consultation period ended on 30 September. We are currently considering the responses and expect to make an announcement on the way-forward in December. Any statutory changes to the Regulations will be subject to Parliamentary approval.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the operation of the Packaging Waste Regulations 1997 on the independent waste paper processing industry. [60488]

Mr. Meacher: A consultation document on the review of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997, was issued on 30 July this year and the consultation period ended on 30 September.

There were a number of responses to the Consultation Paper from independent waste paper processors, including the Independent Waste Paper Processors Association, which represents one hundred and three members. Their concerns have been noted and will be taken into consideration when a final decision on the Review is reached. The Government intend to make an announcement on the way forward soon.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the compliance costs are under the packaging waste regulations for *(a)* typical major food retailers and *(b)* packaging manufacturers. [60338]

Mr. Meale: It is difficult at this stage to estimate the costs faced by a typical business or by different parts of the packaging chain. For the purposes of the Regulations, obligated businesses must identify which sector they are in, but they may perform more than one activity with respect to packaging. There are however, a number of implicit costs associated with compliance, including: initial registration; annual collection and supply of data, calculation of recovery and recycling obligations; facilitating sufficient recovery and recycling of packaging waste to meet obligations and obtaining supporting evidence of compliance and submitting a certificate of compliance. The compliance costs will also be determined by the amount of obligation facing each company.

The Regulations share the obligation to recover and recycle target levels of packaging waste between the four main sectors in the packaging chain according to the "activity" performed with regard to packaging and on the percentages agreed by industry on 15 December 1995. The "activity" obligations in the Regulations are:

Raw materials manufacturer 6 per cent.

Convertor 11 per cent.

Packer/filler 36 per cent.

Seller 47 per cent.

The costs faced by retailers or packaging manufacturers will depend on the product range including the range of materials handled, the size of the firm and the ease with which packaging waste can be recovered and data obtained. Consequently, we are unable to distinguish between the relative costs faced by firms in different sectors of the packaging chain.

The consultation paper on the review of the Regulations issued on 30 July included a draft Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). This asked businesses to provide the Department with some further information on costs. Revisions will be made and a further RIA will be produced when the Regulations are amended.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60210]

Mr. Meale: I welcome the independent assessment of my Department's recent quarterly returns on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. I can assure the hon. Member that the Department is making every effort to deal with the problems identified particularly as the assessment reinforces that made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council in September. My Department is pleased to note the positive feedback on progress in the Centre. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of DETR latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library of the House and published on the Internet.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy that all local authorities should publish details of their Year 2000 planning; and if he will make a statement. [60209]

Mr. Raynsford: We wish to see all public sector bodies publishing their plans for dealing with the millennium bug and reporting every 100 days on their progress against their plans. We are working with the Local Government Association to achieve this in the local government sector.

Regional Eurostar Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the timescale for the review of regional Eurostar services. [59441]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The review is to be presented to Government shortly, and we will report the outcome to the House before the end of the year.

Flooding (Guidance)

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review planning guidance in respect of areas prone to flooding; and if he will make a statement. [60243]

Mr. Raynsford: Existing guidance, which was issued in 1992 as DOE Circular 30/92 (MAFF Circular FD 1/92), already advises strongly against development in areas prone to flooding. The Independent Review of the Easter Floods found that, in recent years, local planning authorities had heeded advice from the Environment Agency on development in flood plains but that there was a legacy of imprudent past development in areas at risk of flooding.

The Government indicated in their response to the Agriculture Select Committee Report on Flood and Coastal Defence (House of Commons Paper 1117), which was published on 29 October, that they will consider, in the light of that report and the recent report of the Independent Review of the Easter Floods, together with any specific evidence from the Environment Agency or any other parties regarding deficiencies in the planning system, whether the present guidance to local planning authorities needs to be made even more emphatic. My Department will review the evidence with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Environment Agency to determine by the spring of next year what revision, if any, would help in directing future development so as to avoid adding to the problem.

Meanwhile, the Government continue to look to local planning authorities and the Environment Agency to maintain effective liaison on flood risk matters, both in terms of preparing development plans and in determining individual planning applications. In doing so, local authorities should continue to take the advice of Circular 30/92 into account.

Bus Passes

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to review the operation of the London Regional Transport Act 1984 so as to equalise the age at which bus passes are made available to male and female pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [60416]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Provision was made in the Pension Act 1995 for the age at which women became eligible for concessionary travel schemes to be raised from 60 to 65 years over a transitional period from 2010 to 2020. This maintains the link between concessionary travel and pensions, and eliminates the discrimination against men. The Government have no plans to change these dates.

Social Exclusion

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to better co-ordinate Government policies to combat poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. [58917]

Mr. Meale: The Government believe in the importance of integrating policies for rural areas, and ensuring that the rural dimension is fully reflected in wider policy-making. DETR is developing better arrangements with MAFF for the joint planning of countryside and rural policies and programmes; Regional Development Agencies will be taking an integrated approach to the regeneration of deprived areas in all parts of their regions; and the new countryside agency to be formed in April 1999 will be promoting and developing policies to overcome disadvantage and social exclusion in rural areas.

The Rural Development Commission has recently published reports on two major research projects on rural deprivation: *Developing Indicators of Rural Disadvantage* and *Rural Disadvantage—Understanding the Processes.* We will be taking forward the findings of these reports with the new countryside agency.

Audit Fees (Councils)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much was paid by local and parish councils in England for audit fees in each of the last five years; and what proportion of their budget this represented for each of those years. [60423]

Mr. Raynsford: This information is not available centrally. I will ask the Controller of Audit to write to my hon. Friend with details of the audit fees charged for the years concerned.

National Air Traffic Services

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultation has taken place with the International Civil Aviation Organisation on the option of a public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services with regard to the current NATS contract for the control of international airspace in the Eastern Atlantic; and if NATS would be allowed to operate a for profit air traffic control service for ICAO in international airspace. [59964]

Dr. Reid: A copy of the consultation paper "A public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS)", published on 20 October, has been sent to the Secretary General of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, and the Government will be happy to discuss any matters on which ICAO wishes to comment. The provision of air traffic control services in the Eastern Atlantic is the responsibility of the Governments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, by virtue of an international agreement reached under the aegis of the International Civil Aviation Organisation. We believe that—as long as charges are reasonable—our international partners, and the airlines using the service, will regard the safety, reliability and quality of the service provided as more important than the status of the service provider.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how a structure of incentives and disciplines will be established to maximise efficiency in the event of a public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services; [59961]

(2) what contingency plans he has for replacing National Air Traffic Services after the introduction of a public/private partnership in the event of failure to comply with an enforcement notice; [59960]

(3) how the Government will maintain sufficient rights and safeguards in respect of *(a)* national security, *(b)* the United Kingdom's international relationships and *(c)* other public interests, if the proposed public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services goes ahead; [59956]

(4) if the Government will ensure that National Air Traffic Services plc cannot be taken over by a non-British company at a future date; [59959]

(5) what contingency plans he has made in the event of the company becoming insolvent under the option of a public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services; with particular reference to *(a)* the conduct of licensed activities pending transfer to another company, *(b)* the transfer of an insolvent company as a going concern to ensure that the licensed activities could be carried on and *(c)* staff terms and conditions. [60154]

Dr. Reid: The detailed arrangements for the proposed public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS) have not yet been determined, and we wish to take full account of responses to the consultation paper published on 20 October 1998 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, before reaching final decisions on the proposal. The consultation period ends on 31 January 1999.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much of the contracted investment has yet to be raised for the new en route centre at Swanwick. [59957]

Dr. Reid: The last of the contracts for the provision of the building and systems at the Swanwick centre were closed in April this year. Total capital expenditure on these contracts amounted to £350.1m.

The Government have commissioned consultants to look at the costs and project management of the Swanwick centre. Their report should be available in February next year.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress to date on replacing the Oceanic flight data processing system at Prestwick. [59963]

Dr. Reid: Discussions between NATS and the contractor, EDS Ltd., are continuing over issues which have arisen at the project definition stage of this project.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what options other than the public/private partnership he considered in order to achieve a capital receipt to allow other transport schemes to benefit from the proceeds of changing the structure of National Air Traffic Services. [59962]

Dr. Reid: As I sought to explain to the Transport Sub-Committee of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, the Government's preferred option of a public/private partnership for NATS was intended to confer a range of benefits on NATS itself, its customers, and the UK more generally thereby providing an innovative solution to growing air traffic demands in the next century. The proceeds are a benefit which will fund other transport schemes but that was not the main objective in the Government's considerations.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the Government's preferred option of a public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services will affect the PFI contracts for the new Scottish and Oceanic air traffic control centres. [59953]

Dr. Reid: The Government's financial advisers are currently considering the possible relationship between the proposed public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services and the financing of the New Scottish and Oceanic centres. The Government remain committed to NATS's strategy of providing two centres at Swanwick and Prestwick to deal with air traffic flying over the UK.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason the recently revised financial structure for municipally owned airports will not apply to finance for national air traffic development. [59955]

Dr. Reid: We carefully considered each case on its own merits and concluded that the degree of commercial freedom sought by NATS's management would be incompatible with public sector status. In the longer term, NATS may want to expand into European and world-wide air traffic control markets—or even into non-ATC business. The case with the municipally owned airports is somewhat different, and the commercial freedom we are offering them will be restricted to airport-related investment in the UK.

Manchester Airport

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will forecast the capital investment programme for Manchester airport for the next 10 years. [59954]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Manchester Airport last published its long-term development strategy in May 1993, covering the period to 2005. This was updated in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's quinquennial review of the airport's pricing and trading practices, published in July 1997. Appendix 9.2 of the MMC Report sets out the airport's capital investment programme until 2007–08, and its forecast for expenditure during the ten-year period from 1998–99 to 2007–08, which was then expected to total some £643 million. The airport is currently discussing a figure of around £686 million for this period with the Civil Aviation Authority and the airlines. I understand that the airport is also reviewing its long-term strategy in the light of developments since 1993, including the Government's intention to remove borrowing controls for financially sound local authority airport companies.

Planning Applications (London Boroughs)

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the planning applications of London boroughs on which he has intervened this year by way of Article 14

directions, indicating the date *(a)* when each intervention was made and *(b)* when he made his decision on each. [60542]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend has intervened in planning applications by giving the article 14 Directions in the table.

Date	*Application*	*London Borough*	*Decision issued*
7 January	Southall Park, Southall, UB1	Ealing	6 March
17 July	Bowring Building, 4–31 Tower Place EC3	City of London	21 July
30 October	Gothic works site, Glover Drive N18	Enfield	No
10 September	St. Paul's Hospital, Endell Street, WC2	Camden	17 November
30 September	Battersea Bus Garage/Albion Wharf, Hester Road, SW11	Wandsworth	No
10 November	Gargoyle Wharf, York Road, SW18	Wandsworth	No
12 November	Tooting Bec Hospital (Phase 2), Tooting Bec Road/Church Lane SW17	Wandsworth	No
12 November	Friends Provident Site, Brewhouse Street SW15	Wandsworth	No

Note:
15 further directions were given on applications referred to the Government Office as departures from development plans or under the shopping direction to permit more time for consideration of the cases. Five of them remain undecided.

Air Quality

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *89*, if he will include in the forthcoming review of the air quality strategy the statistics on human mortality and morbidity arising from different forms of energy generation presented in *(a)* UK Environmental Accounts 1998 published by the Office for National Statistics, *(b)* The Social Cost of Fuel Cycles published by the DTI in 1992, *(c)* The National Air Quality Strategy published by the Department of the Environment in March 1997 and *(d)* Quantification of the Effects of Air Pollution on Health in the United Kingdom published by the Department of Health, 1998. [60582]

Mr. Meale: The report on the review of the National Air Quality Strategy, which I expect to publish for consultation early in the New Year, will discuss the various impacts on health of air pollution. It will draw on the report published earlier this year by the Department of Health on the Quantification of the Effects of Air Pollution on Health in the United Kingdom, which attempted for the first time to measure the effects of air pollution on the health of people in the UK.

Latex

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many reports of disease due to exposure to latex have been made under the Reporting of Injury, Disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations in each of the past 10 years. [60580]

Mr. Meale: The number of cases of occupational asthma and occupational dermatitis reported as due to latex under the RIDDOR regulations are given in the table. Reporting of occupational disease cases under RIDDOR is incomplete. Dermatitis was designated as a reportable disease with effect from 1 April 1996, and there are therefore no cases reported under RIDDOR before this date. No cases of occupational asthma due to latex were reported for the years from 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1993 inclusive.

	Occupational asthma	*Occupational dermatitis*
1993–94	1	—
1994–95	0	—
1995–96	1	—
1996–97	3	18
1997–98	1	18

Drug Abuse

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates the Health and Safety Executive has made of the number of *(a)* fatal accidents and *(b)* injuries at work as a consequence of drug abuse for the last year for which figures are available. [60425]

Mr. Meale: The Health and Safety Executive has made no such estimates.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact of drug abuse on health and safety in the work place; and if he will make a statement. [60426]

Mr. Meale: The Health and Safety Executive commissioned a study of psychotropic drugs and work performance and the health implications of recreational drug use.

The Health and Safety Executive, along with other Government departments, intends to commission further research next year on the effects on performance and increased risk of accidents from alcohol and drugs—both illegal and legal, including psychoactive medication transferred into the work environment.

School Crossing Patrols

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what decision he has reached following the recent public consultation on proposed changes to the powers of school crossing patrols. [60652]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My noble Friend the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Lord Whitty, has announced today that the existing powers of School Crossing Patrols should be enhanced by allowing them to cross children of

any age along with any adults who may wish to use the facility. The existing time limits on when crossings may operate will also be removed. These proposals were supported by a large majority of those who responded to the public consultation.

The consultation also asked whether there was a need for the creation of community crossing patrols—attended crossings similar to school patrols but provided at any location where there was a perceived need for one. The majority of those who responded opposed this mainly on the grounds of cost and because there was no need for a further type of crossing in addition to the Zebra, Pelican and Puffin crossings which operate continually.

We will not therefore be proceeding with community crossing patrols but will be taking forward the School Crossing Patrol changes at the earliest legislative opportunity. A Press Notice giving further details has been placed in the Library.

London (Emergency and Civil Protection)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the responsibilities of the Greater London Assembly and Mayor of London in relation to emergency planning and civil protection. [59589]

Mr. George Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

The Greater London Assembly, through the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, will be responsible for those aspects of emergency planning and civil protection which currently rest with the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Meat (Hygiene and Inspection)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the increase in the level of supervision in slaughterhouses resulting from the implementation of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Charges Regulations 1998. [58234]

Mr. Nick Brown: The recently announced increases in the level of veterinary supervision in licensed meat plants, including slaughterhouses, stem from the under-implementation by the previous Government of harmonised Community meat hygiene rules in Great Britain, for which the European Commission has begun infraction proceedings against the United Kingdom.

After detailed consideration, we have concluded that veterinary supervision arrangements of licensed plants in Great Britain should be brought into line with Community rules as quickly as possible. As full compliance is not possible immediately, essentially because of a shortage of veterinarians in the UK willing to undertake meat hygiene work, the Meat Hygiene Service has produced a programme of initiatives to secure additional veterinary resources and to implement a series of incremental increases in veterinary supervision levels over a relatively short period of time as those additional resources become available.

In accordance with EC rules, the costs of such additional veterinary supervision will have to be recovered from plant operators in the normal way. We recognise, of course, that the resulting increase in costs will be unwelcome to the industry, but the increased supervision is essential if official control over fresh meat in licensed plants is to be improved, a European Court case is to be avoided, and our efforts to have the beef export ban lifted for the whole of the UK are not to be undermined.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Maples: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to provide a substantive reply to the question from the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon tabled on 7 October. [57986]

Mr. Nick Brown: Shortly.

BSE

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for *(a)* each EU country *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* Northern Ireland the number of BSE cases recorded in each of the last three years for which figures are readily available and the figures for this year to the latest available date, indicating for each of the United Kingdom countries the figures for each month of the current year to 30 September. [55495]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to his reply, 21 October 1998, c. 1154]:* Figures for confirmed BSE cases in other EU countries for 1995, 1996, 1997 and to the end of September 1998, supplied to us by the Commission, are given in the table:

EU country	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998 (to 30 September 1998)*
Belgium	—	—	1	4
France	3	12	6	10
Germany[1]	—	—	2	—
Luxembourg	—	—	1	—
Netherlands	—	—	2	1
Portugal	14	29	30	60
Republic of Ireland	16	73	77	46

[1] Germany has reported no homebred cases of BSE

Fishing

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure the consistency of fishing vessel safety inspections. [60181]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

The consistency of fishing vessel safety inspections is established principally by means of statutory fishing vessel rules and regulations, and supplementary guidance for surveyors carrying out the inspections. Other steps being taken include surveyor training, monitoring of inspections, meetings between fishing vessel surveyors and meetings with the fishing industry.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the principle of relative stability will continue beyond 2002; [59824]

(2) what legal text governs the length of time that the principle of relative stability will continue. [59825]

Mr. Morley: Article 8(4) of Council Regulation (EC) 3760/92 lays down the requirement to distribute fishing opportunities between Member States in such a way as to assure each Member State relative stability of fishing activities for each of the stocks concerned. No time limit is placed on the duration of this provision. It will therefore continue automatically beyond 2002 unless there is agreement by the Council, acting by qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission, to change it.

Environmental Integration

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to implement the Cardiff Summit Ministerial Declaration on environmental integration; what indicators he is developing for measuring progress; and if he will raise these matters at the forthcoming Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting. [55780]

Mr. Morley: The integration of environmental considerations into EU agricultural policy is on the agenda for the Agriculture Council on 23 and 24 November. The Government are continuing to press for fundamental reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to meet the commitments made at the Cardiff Summit in May this year.

MAFF has published a consultation document containing proposals for a set of indicators to measure progress towards sustainable agriculture in the UK. The responses are being assessed and we aim to publish the indicators in 1999.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54271]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* In association with Royal National Institute for the Blind, MAFF has produced two publications which have been made available in alternative formats; including Braille, large print and audio cassettes. The publications are:

Healthy Eating for Older People—available since 1993 and;

New Microwave Labels—available since 1992

Beef

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals have been made by the EU Veterinary Committee about de-boning beef in slaughter houses *(a)* for the domestic market and *(b)* for export; and what impact these proposals will have on progress towards the restoration of beef exports from Britain. [57482]

Mr. Rooker: The European Commission has made a proposal for the export of UK beef and beef products from animals born after 1 August 1996 (the 'Date Based Export Scheme'). On the advice of the EC Scientific Steering Committee, the scheme is restricted to deboned beef. The original proposal also required all beef sold on the domestic market to be deboned but a revised proposal no longer contains this provision. That proposal received the support of a simple majority of Member States at the Standing Veterinary Committee on 4 November. Since it did not obtain a qualified majority, it has now been referred to the Council, who are expected to vote on it on 23 November.

Environmental Indicators

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the development of environmental indicators for agriculture by the OECD for use in OECD member countries. [56772]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 October 1998]:* The OECD is developing a set of indicators to measure the environmental impacts of agriculture and agricultural policies across OECD countries.

The UK hosted a workshop on behalf of the OECD in York on 22–25 September to help progress this work. The workshop's conclusions and recommendations will be discussed at an OECD meeting in Paris on 14–16 December.

Sustainable Agriculture

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many responses he received to his Department's consultation document, Development of a Set of Indicators for Sustainable Agriculture in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [56770]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 October 1998]:* The Department received 75 written responses to the consultation document from external organisations or individuals.

The responses are being assessed and we aim to publish the indicators next year.

Farm Subsidies

Ms Keeble: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if farmers can have their subsidy payment made by credit transfer as well as by cheque. [56710]

Mr. Morley: It is MAFF's intention to offer payment of Grants and Subsidies to farmers by BACS (Bankers Automated Clearing System) during 1999.

Pig Industry

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to encourage caterers and processors to source pigmeat from the UK. [57788]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The Government, supported by the Meat and Livestock Commission, launched a campaign in July, aimed at the catering and food service sector with the aim of increasing the use of UK pigmeat in this important sector.

The campaign was completed on 16 November when the pig producers and processors were brought together with the catering and food service sector with the aim of finding a mutual interest in developing trade between the sectors. This action will help our Industry to find new opportunities for pigmeat produced in the UK.

EU Milk Quotas

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the milk processing industry on the restrictions of the EU milk quota system in the UK. [59448]

Mr. Rooker: My right hon. Friend the Minister met the representatives of the Dairy Industry Federation on 11 November to discuss, among other issues, the Government's policy on reforming the EU milk quota system.

Nutrition

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the nutritional value of *(a)* frozen food and *(b)* food which is fresh or has been chilled. [59767]

Mr. Rooker: MAFF continuously monitors the nutritional value of food at the retail level. Chilled, frozen, canned or dried foods such as fruit and vegetables are a convenient way of adding variety to the diet and can be as nutritious as fresh produce. Although nutrient losses may occur in some foods during storage or processing, as well as during cooking at home, these losses are not of major significance in a mixed diet.

Landing Ports

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what fisheries conservation objectives are intended to be achieved by the designation of landing ports. [59828]

Mr. Morley: Tighter controls on landings, including designated ports, are being introduced to assist fisheries inspectors with the task of monitoring catches and therefore the uptake of quotas which are set in order to conserve fish stocks and maintain sustainable fisheries.

Animal By-Products Order 1992

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those rendering plants currently in operation in accordance with the Animal By-Products Order 1992 indicating for each whether *(a)* a waste water disposal system meeting hygiene requirements is required, *(b)* ministerial approval has been given for each facility and *(c)* a waste water disposal system is currently operating. [60025]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The following rendering plants are currently approved and operating under the Animal By-Products Order 1992.

Alba Proteins Ltd. (Cumbria)
Chambers (AW) Ltd. (Yorks)
Chettles Ltd. (Northants)
Chettles Ltd. (Notts)
Chetwynds Animal By-Products (1995) Ltd. (Cardigan)
Compton (RJ) & Sons (Bradford on Avon)
Cooper (DS) Ltd. (Huddersfield)
Croda Colloids Ltd. (Leics)
Dundas Brothers Ltd. (Aberdeen)
Dundas Chemical Co. Ltd. (Dumfries)
Fats and Proteins (UK) Ltd. (Lancaster)
Granox Ltd. (Cheshire)
Grimsby Fish Products (GFP) Ltd. (South Humberside)
Hughes (A) and Sons (Skellingthorpe) Ltd. (Lincoln)
Interfish Ltd. (Devon)
John Knights ABP Ltd. (London)
Lloyd Maunder Ltd. (Devon)
McIntosh Donald Ltd. (Aberdeen)
Mitchells By-Products Ltd. (West Yorks)
Pears (JG) (Newark) Ltd. (Notts)
Pimlott (SC) and Sons (Norwich)
Pointon (J) & Sons Ltd. (Staffs)
Prosper De Mulder and Sons Ltd. (Warwicks)
Shetland Fish Products Ltd. (Shetland)
Shrewsbury (ABP) Ltd. (Shropshire)
Sun Valley Poultry Ltd. (Hereford)
United Fish Products Ltd. (Aberdeen)
Waddington (P) & Co. Ltd. (Bradford)

All of these plants are approved by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is a condition of approval in each case that the plant has a waste water disposal system meeting hygiene requirements. If this system is not operational, the plant would be in breach of its approval.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Animal By-Products Order 1992 in relation to off-site hygienic disposal. [60042]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The Animal By-Products Order 1992 requires animal by-products to be disposed of by rendering, incineration, use of scientific purposes, or in certain circumstances, by burial or burning. For low risk material, use for the production of petfood, pharmaceutical or technical products is also allowed, and for low risk material and certain types of high risk material, treatment at a knacker's yard, hunt kennel, maggot farm or similar premises is permitted.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria apply to define a waste water system as required by the Animal By-Products Order 1992; and if he will make a statement. [60026]

Mr. Rooker: The Animal By-Products Order 1992 does not specify the criteria that define a waste water system. Responsibility for enforcing controls on the disposal of waste water rests with the water authorities and, in some cases, the Environment Agency.

Dry Stone Walls

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to *(a)* prevent the destruction and *(b)* encourage the maintenance of dry stone walls. [60006]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry helps to prevent the destruction and encourages the maintenance of dry stone walls through agri-environment schemes. Both the Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Stewardship Schemes provide payments for wall restoration and associated maintenance.

The Government are also considering the recommendations of the Environment Sub-committee report on their Inquiry into the Protection of Field Boundaries.

EU Fisheries (Relative Stability Principle)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which other EU states have pledged their support for the retention of the principle of relative stability as per the 1983 agreement. [59826]

Mr. Morley: Because there is no expectation that the principle of relative stability will lapse, Member States have not been called upon to pledge their support in the Fisheries Council for its continuation. None has suggested to the Council that it should not be retained.

Badgers

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the studies of badger control and tuberculosis will begin in the six areas which he has already announced; when he will announce the remaining 24 areas to reach the minimum number proposed by Professor Krebs; and when those studies will begin. [60234]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Surveying in the Devon/Cornwall triplet (group of three areas) has been completed. Within the triplet, the Putford area has been randomly allocated the proactive culling treatment, Hartland the reactive culling treatment and Bude the survey only treatment. Ministry staff started placing traps in the Putford area on 16 November. Once in place, the traps will be pre-baited for a period before trapping begins.

Surveying is continuing in the Gloucestershire/ Herefordshire triplet.

Other triplets will be selected, on the basis of the latest information on the pattern of TB incidents, as resources become available to start work. I expect the next two triplets to be identified within the next few months.

Global Warming

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect of global warming on coastal defences. [58632]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Since 1989, MAFF has set allowances for sea level rise for operating authorities to take into account when designing coastal defences. The current allowance of 4.5mm a year is based on predictions by the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change. This figure is adjusted regionally to take account of long term geological tilt of the UK and the allowances now in use are:

Environment Agency Region	*Allowance (mm per year)*
North East (South of Flamborough Head), Anglian, Thames, Southern	6
South West, Wales	5
North West, North East (North of Flamborough Head)	4

These allowances apply to defences with a predicted life up to 2030; for those with an expected life beyond this period, designs should be adaptable to allow for any future change in predictions.

These allowances are kept under review as further research becomes available, including predictions provided in October 1998 by the UK Climate Impacts Programme. The current allowance should accommodate the most likely predictions in relative mean sea level until at least the middle of the next century.

Genetically Modified Food

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if current safety testing regulations for genetically modified foods include a requirement to test for side effects in humans. [59143]

Mr. Rooker: The safety assessment of all novel, including genetically modified (GM), food is undertaken on a case by case basis in accordance with the European Commission guidelines which accompany EC Novel Foods Regulation (258/97). These guidelines, which have been published in the Official Journal of the European Communities (L253 vol 40 of 16/9/97), identify the situations where human studies may be necessary. As an additional safeguard, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, who advise ministers on the safety of novel foods, are currently considering arrangements for post market monitoring of GM foods.

Supermarkets

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with representatives from supermarkets about the British farming industry. [58786]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 12 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *463*.

WALES

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the names of those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May 1997, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [56830]

Mr. Michael: This information, including the date of appointment and any remuneration received, is published quarterly in the report "Appointments made by the Secretary of State for Wales". The latest version, dated 1 September 1998, is available in the House of Commons Library.

Education Funding

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what education funding was provided for each county in Wales for each of the past five years. [59581]

Mr. Hain: The bulk of funding for education is provided to local authorities through the annual revenue and capital settlements. The main additional items of specific funding were as follows:

Additional capital funding for schools (New Deal)

(£)

Authority	Allocation 1997–98	Allocation 1998–99
Anglesey	106,000	280,178
Blaenau Gwent	110,000	290,750
Bridgend	216,000	570,928
Caerphilly	287,000	758,594
Cardiff	474,000	1,252,869
Carmarthenshire	336,000	888,110
Ceredigion	156,000	412,337
Conwy	144,000	380,619
Denbighshire	167,000	441,412
Flintshire	233,000	615,862
Gwynedd	238,000	629,078
Merthyr Tydfil	109,000	288,107
Monmouthshire	134,000	354,187
Neath Port Talbot	215,000	568,285
Newport	231,000	610,576
Pembrokeshire	208,000	549,782
Powys	393,000	1,038,771
Rhondda Cynon Taff	417,000	1,102,208
Swansea	345,000	911,899
Torfaen	154,000	407,050
Vale of Glamorgan	170,000	449,341
Wrexham	182,000	481,060
Total	5,025,000	13,282,000

Popular schools initiative

(£)

LEA	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Bridgend	—	—	—	157,367
Cardiff	—	199,335	2,021,304	2,817,361
Carmarthenshire	620,000	199,746	118,445	20,000
Conwy	5,529	94,416	—	—
Denbighshire	79,846	904,988	1,781,304	575,000
Flintshire	—	153,508	542,685	1,243,000
Gwynedd	—	—	12,342	—
Newport	33,283	1,189,943	1,268,000	31,745
Pembrokeshire	—	—	13,354	—
Powys	—	106,449	1,052,011	171,540
Swansea	—	119,547	305,453	—
Wrexham	8,637	20,010	604,753	—
Total	747,295	2,987,942	7,719,651	5,016,013

S21 grants to support developments in Welsh language education

(£)

LEA	1994–95	1995–96
Clwyd	262,900	259,500
Dyfed	242,500	261,500
Gwent	344,000	329,000
Gwynedd	227,000	214,000
Mid Glamorgan	257,100	262,500
Powys	204,000	192,000
South Glamorgan	204,500	210,500
West Glamorgan	247,500	240,500
Total	1,989,500	1,969,500

LEA	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Anglesey	48,100	58,000	63,000
Gwynedd	100,000	114,000	114,000
Conwy	80,000	78,500	77,500
Denbighshire	66,300	63,800	63,300
Flintshire	94,250	87,000	82,000
Wrexham	84,850	78,250	73,000
Powys	192,000	193,500	195,000
Ceredigion	52,300	64,000	70,000
Pembrokeshire	78,450	91,000	95,000
Carmarthen	138,750	138,500	139,500
Swansea	144,300	142,250	136,245
Neath/Port Talbot	96,200	95,700	93,320
Bridgend	64,470	[1]—	66,808
Caerphilly	87,687	[1]—	89,077
Rhondda Cynon Taff	126,348	[1]—	127,255
Merthyr Tydfil	33,995	[1]—	34,995
Vale of Glamorgan	58,500	57,000	57,000
Blaenau Gwent	46,200	42,000	42,000
Torfaen	78,250	74,500	74,500
Monmouthshire	113,750	96,000	60,000
Newport	92,050	87,500	87,500
Cardiff	152,000	149,000	150,000
Total	2,028,750	1,710,500	1,991,000

[1] Joint total for 4 authorities—316,500 (1997–98), 312,500 (1996–97)

Grants for education support and training (GEST)

£000

LEA	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Clwyd	3,225.4	3,303	—	—	—
Dyfed	3,101.4	3,179	—	—	—
Gwent	3,833.3	3,767	—	—	—
Gwynedd	2,055.5	1,962.7	—	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	4,408.6	4,416.3	—	—	—
Powys	1,420.3	1,409.6	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	3,122.3	3,190.7	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	2,783.8	2,789.1	—	—	—
Blaenau Gwent	—	—	674.16	688.6	731.3
Bridgend	—	—	1,034.05	1,095.8	1,283.12
Caerphilly	—	—	1,421.2	1,450.9	1,779.47
Cardiff	—	—	2,395.2	2,466.7	2,828.66
Carms	—	—	1,559.7	1,632.2	1,998.83
Ceredigion	—	—	754.7	759.9	939.34
Conwy	—	—	635.4	713.8	847.19
Denbighshire	—	—	824.35	835.9	1,065.37
Flintshire	—	—	1,205.8	1,229.9	1,496.81
Gwynedd	—	—	1,069.1	1,118.8	1,488.27

Grants for education support and training (GEST)

£000

LEA	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Isle of Anglesey	—	—	566.8	592.4	753.99
Merthyr Tydfil	—	—	546.15	596	673.42
Monmouth	—	—	704.3	663	798.96
Neath Port Talbot	—	—	1,110.7	1,172	1,421.59
Newport	—	—	1,183.55	1,212.5	1,368.04
Pembroke	—	—	1,086	1,133.6	1,398.41
Powys	—	—	1,364.6	1,429	1,788.79
Rhondda Cynon Taff	—	—	2,060.9	2,166	2,531.58
Swansea	—	—	1,815.4	1,892.8	2,085.88
Torfaen	—	—	749.9	828.2	967.9
Vale of Glamorgan	—	—	894.2	977.1	1,194.34
Wrexham	—	—	1,010.65	1,014.8	1,177.9
Allocation at 100 per cent.	23,950.6	24,017.4	24,761.8	25,669.9	30,719.2

Note:
All figures quoted are gross programme allocations

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the financial allocations made to education services since May 1997 that have been additional to the expenditure previously agreed. [60306]

Mr. Hain: The additional financial allocations for education services in Wales since May 1997 to date are as follows:

Allocations	*£ million*
1997–98	
School building improvements, security measures and technology facilities	5.025
1998–99	
School building improvements, security measures and technology facilities	13.3
Voluntary Aided Schools—building improvements	1.0
Implementation of National Grid for Learning in Wales	3.0
Additional revenue funding for education/schools	48.8
Infant class size reduction measures	3.7
Literacy and numeracy strategies	3.5
Further Education (including £3.5m for Skills Training)	8.9

An additional £10m was also made available for higher education in Wales.

Voluntary Sector

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when an announcement will be made about the compact between the Government and the voluntary sector in Wales. [60674]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Compact between the Government and the Voluntary Sector in Wales has been published today. Copies of the document have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Tourism Grants

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total value of grants awarded in Wales under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 in each year since April 1992. [60597]

Mr. Hain: The following section 4 grants were awarded by the Wales Tourist Board:

Year	*Grant allocated (£)*
1992–93	4,870,000
1993–94	5,138,717
1994–95	3,618,801
1995–96	3,279,971
1996–97	3,578,441
1997–98	3,424,996

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60227]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend the President of the Council presents quarterly reviews to Parliament of progress on tackling all issues relating to the Millennium date change problem across central Government and the wider public sector. The conclusions of Taskforce 2000 in respect of my Department contain no surprises.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the Welsh Office latest quarterly return will be placed in the libraries of the House and published on the Internet.

Children's Services

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the financial allocation made to services for children since May 1997 that have been additional to the expenditure previously agreed. [60305]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The provision for the Looked After Children Development Fund for 1998–99 is £1.0 million which compares with £500,000 in 1997–98. Provision for grants to children and families for 1998–99 is £2.884 million and was £2,822 million in 1997–98. Provision for Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) grants in 1998–99 is £44,000, the same as for the previous year.

NHS (Financial Allocations)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the financial allocations made to the NHS since May 1997 that have been additional to the expenditure previously agreed. [60312]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Since coming into office, we announced, in May 1997, £600,000 for cancer services and £2.5 million for primary care. In October 1997, we announced £9.5 million to assist with winter pressures.

In December 1997, a cash increase of £113.8 million for NHS Wales for 1998–99 was announced by the Secretary of State, which included £60.2 million new money from the July budget and an additional £1.3 million new money from the Welsh Block. In March, we announced an additional £25.1 million for NHS Wales in 1998–99 to bring in-patient waiting lists down. On 3 November, the Secretary of State announced an additional £12.5 million to alleviate winter pressures and emergencies.

These allocations total £164 million of which £111.7 million was additional to expenditure previously planned.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each housing authority the amount in rent revenue that was a contribution towards housing benefit in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [60308]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The figures in the table represent the difference between the cost of rent rebates incurred by local authorities and the amount of Housing Revenue Account Subsidy paid by the Welsh Office. The data for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are provisional.

£

Authority	*1996–97*[1]	*1997–98*[2]	*1998–99*[3]
Blaenau Gwent CBC	448,107	774,684	1,416,072
Bridgend CBC	3,953,365	4,105,790	4,321,524
Caerphilly CBC	3,901,369	3,915,922	4,672,646
Cardiff—City & County	9,166,609	9,879,371	10,393,608
Carmarthenshire CC	2,087,998	2,232,988	2,610,614
Ceredigion CC	1,380,258	1,420,000	1,508,120
Conwy CBC	1,697,915	1,754,885	1,823,906
Denbighshire CC	2,637,471	2,516,268	2,857,120
Flintshire CC	4,175,219	4,312,925	4,168,189
Gwynedd CC	2,946,009	3,207,923	3,459,688
Isle of Anglesey CC	1,761,592	1,888,661	2,146,116
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	113,957	225,573	484,304
Monmouthshire CC	2,486,877	2,643,074	2,797,138
Neath Port Talbot CBC	2,413,550	2,951,221	3,313,655
Newport CBC	8,175,107	8,095,709	9,724,678
Pembrokeshire CC	4,619,845	4,822,248	5,088,105
Powys CC	4,494,447	4,509,620	4,754,372
Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC	0	0	0
Swansea—City & County	2,666,288	2,910,645	3,407,243
Torfaen CBC	7,865,355	8,235,748	9,174,681
Vale of Glamorgan CBC	4,407,682	4,368,199	4,395,570
Wrexham CBC	5,761,081	6,075,570	6,819,833

[1] Data from the HRAS Claim Form, Audit Final 1996–97

[2] Data from the HRAS Claim Form, Advance Final 1997–98

[3] Data from the HRAS Claim Form, Second Advance 1998–99

Disabled People

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the efforts he is making to improving work prospects for people in Wales who have a disability. [60546]

Mr. Hain: The New Deal for Disabled People is testing out ways of providing active help into work for those who want it. Wales has the largest Personal Adviser Service pilot project. This started on 28 September 1998, in the Eastern Valleys (Ebbw Vale, Caerphilly, Blackwood, Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare), and is being implemented by the Employment Service in partnership with the Benefits Agency. People on incapacity benefit in the pilot area are invited to participate on a voluntary basis and are offered individual support to help them overcome their barriers to employment.

In addition, under the innovative schemes strand of the New Deal, a number of pilot projects are being run in parts of Wales to help disabled people into work. These include projects being delivered by the Leonard Cheshire Foundation and Disability Business Partnerships. A second tranche of projects will be announced in the New Year.

Across the UK a range of measures are being taken which will help disabled people. These include:

an additional £30 million is to be invested by the Department for Education and Employment in specialist disability services over the next three years;

the introduction of comprehensive and enforceable civil rights through full implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the establishment of a Disability Rights Commission;

the removal of some of the benefits obstacles to work by extending the Social Security linking rule to protect people's rates of benefit and removing the restrictions on voluntary work;

making work pay through the National Minimum Wage and the introduction of the new Disabled Person's Tax Credit.

Further measures to help disabled people who want to work are set out in the recent consultation document "A New Contract for Welfare: Support for Disabled People". These include the introduction of the Single Gateway for all people of working age, including people with a long-term illness or disability and the reform of the "All Work Test".

University Places

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the take-up of university places in Wales. [60557]

Mr. Hain: The latest provisional figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) show that acceptances onto courses at Welsh higher education institutions are holding up well. The fears that there might be a slump in the 1998–99 applications compared to the very healthy 1997–98 figures have not been realised. We have no reason to believe that there is a problem connected with the introduction of the requirement that students contribute towards their tuition fees. We look forward with interest to seeing the final acceptance figures from UCAS which will be available in the next month or so.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of apprenticeships available to Deeside school leavers; and if he will make a statement. [60559]

Mr. Hain: It is not possible from Government sources to quantify the number of apprenticeship places available to Deeside school leavers. Deeside school leavers are able to access both modern and traditional apprenticeships throughout Great Britain. However, in Wales the Government have contracted with TECs for the provision of 4,743 starts on Modern Apprenticeships in 1998–99 of which 750 are in the North Wales TEC area.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what initiatives he will take to improve provision for pupils in primary and secondary schools who suffer from attention deficit disorder and allied difficulties; and if he will make a statement; [60553]

(2) what is his estimate of the number of pupils in the secondary and primary schools of Wales who suffer from attention deficit disorder; and what advice he has given to local education authorities regarding their obligations to assist such pupils. [60554]

Mr. Hain: Information on the number of pupils in primary and secondary schools in Wales with attention deficit disorder (ADD) is not held centrally. Responsibility for ensuring that appropriate provision is made for children with special educational needs (SEN) rests with LEAs and schools. They are required to have regard to the guidance contained in the "Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN" in all of their dealings with children with SEN, including those with learning difficulties associated with ADD. The Code sets out practical guidance on identification and assessment and on making appropriate provision to meet specific needs.

We will publish the response to the "BEST for Special Education" Green Paper consultation, setting out our programme of action for SEN policy and practice over the remainder of this Parliament, towards the end of the year.

New Deal

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made on the New Deal for Lone Parents; and if he will make a statement. [60545]

Mr. Hain: The New Deal for Lone Parents helps lone parents who are currently claiming income support and have children of school age, into sustainable employment. A Personal Adviser Service is available to give individual advice on jobsearch, in work benefits, and child care. Lone parents participate on a voluntary basis and receive support to help them overcome their particular barriers to employment. From 26 October 1998 the programme was extended across Wales to all lone parents on Income Support.

In Wales, results up to 25 September show that 9 out of 10 lone parents who attended an interview with an adviser agreed to participate in the New Deal. Of those who sought the help of the Personal Adviser Service more than a third moved into work.

Early research, commissioned by the Department of Social Security, was carried out across the UK, on lone parents who had moved into work (and claimed Family Credit). It showed that participants in the New Deal for Lone Parents are, on average, £39 per week better off and have reduced their dependency on benefit by £42 per week.

Job Applicants (Deeside)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of skilled and trained applicants from Deeside for jobs from Deeside employers; and if he will make a statement. [60558]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh Office supports an extensive set of programmes available throughout Wales to help employers improve the skills of their employees, to provide young people and unemployed adults with the skills needed by employers and, through the New Deal, to help disadvantaged groups increase their employability, find work and remain in employment. The new economic agenda for Wales, "Pathway to Prosperity", highlights the importance of education, training and lifelong learning in meeting our economic objectives.

Temporary Classrooms

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of temporary classrooms in each of the local education authorities of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [60555]

Mr. Hain: This information is not collected centrally. Provision of school classrooms is a matter for local education authorities and governing bodies of voluntary aided and grant-maintained schools.

HEALTH

ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of research paid for by his Department into ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has been conducted using *(a)* London or Dowsett diagnostic criteria and *(b)* Oxford or CDC 1994 diagnostic criteria. [59334]

Ms Jowell: The Government fund health and medical research in a number of ways.

The Department funds a range of research and development to support its work on policy development and evaluation in health and social care. The Department also manages the National Health Service research and development levy which is used to support research and development of relevance to the National Health Service in hospitals, general practice and other health care settings, and to fund the NHS research and development programme. In addition, the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the research base.

Management of much of the research supported by the NHS research and development levy is devolved and details are not collected routinely by the Department.

Information which is available centrally shows that the NHS research and development programme has funded a research project entitled *Should GPs manage chronic fatigue syndrome? A controlled trial*, which has now reported. This project used the 'Oxford' or Centre for Diseases Control criteria. Further work is about to be commissioned through competitive tender on the topic of Management Strategies for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. The projects and therefore the criteria they will use have not yet been decided upon.

The MRC has funded a project in relation to myalgic encephalomyelitis which has recently been completed. The work was undertaken at the University of Manchester and the project was entitled *The role of noradrenaline in the neuropsychological pathogenesis of the chronic fatigue syndrome*. This project also used the 'Oxford' or Centre for Diseases Control criteria.

Breast Screening

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the interim results of the pilot studies on extension of the breast screening programme. [59713]

Mr. Hutton: Interim results of the pilot study carried out in Brighton (one of three such studies) were published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), Volume 317, page 388, dated 8 August 1998. Copies of the BMJ are available in the Library.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much extra funding has been made available to area health authorities for the provision of mammograms for women over 65 years of age. [59655]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service breast screening programme was set up in 1988. Women aged 50–64 are invited for screening by mammography every three years and women over the age of 64 may request to be screened every three years free of charge.

Provision for screening women over the age of 65 is included in health authority baseline resources and is not therefore specifically identified.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *179*, what the basis was for his statement that haemophiliacs suffering from hepatitis C infected through contaminated blood products during NHS treatment do not suffer the same stigma as haemophiliacs suffering from HIV virus infected in the same way. [59762]

Mr. Hutton: There was widespread public fear of HIV in the 1980s when the infection was rapidly fatal and associated with sexual transmission. This is not the case with hepatitis C.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will reconsider his decision not to provide a financial assistance scheme to haemophiliacs suffering from the hepatitis C virus infected through contaminated blood products during NHS treatment; and if he will make a statement. [59775]

Mr. Hutton: We continue to hold the view that it would not be right to single out people with haemophilia infected with hepatitis C through National Health Service treatment by establishing a special payment scheme. Our general policy is that financial assistance of this kind is only paid where the NHS, or individuals working in it, have been at fault.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *179*, what steps he has taken since to ensure that haemophiliacs suffering from the Hepatitis C virus contracted through infected blood products during NHS treatment will receive adequate social security benefits. [59610]

Mr. Hutton: People with haemophilia who have been infected with hepatitis C through National Health Service treatment with blood products are assessed for their entitlement to assistance under the benefits system in the same way as other people. We have agreed funding for the Haemophilia Society's youth information and support project aimed at providing information to and improving the education and employment prospects of young people with haemophilia who are infected with hepatitis C.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the most recent medical evidence regarding the risks of hepatitis C transmission in families *(a)* between partners and *(b)* between parent and children. [59776]

Mr. Hutton: Limited information is available about the risk of household contact but it is generally thought to be low. Current information indicates that sexual transmission of hepatitis C occurs but that the virus is inefficiently spread in this manner. Prevalence rates for antibodies to hepatitis C of less than 5 per cent. have been found in regular sexual partners of infected individuals. A similar rate of transmission has been found among infants born to mothers with hepatitis C antibodies.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemophilia patients *(a)* were infected with hepatitis C virus through contaminated blood products during NHS treatment prior to 1985, *(b)* await liver transplants as a result of this disease, *(c)* are being treated for this virus within the NHS and *(d)* have died as a result of liver disease to date. [59768]

Mr. Hutton: The Department estimates that 4,000 people with haemophilia were infected with hepatitis C through their National Health Service treatment with blood products before the introduction of viral inactivation processes in 1985. All patients found to be infected in this way are referred to a specialist for further assessment, observation and treatment as appropriate. The Haemophilia Society assesses that 90 patients may have died. The United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority's list of people awaiting liver transplants includes 26 whose primary liver disease is post hepatitis C cirrhosis. While not identified separately on this database, 6 or 7 are believed to have haemophilia.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the costs of providing a hardship fund for haemophiliacs suffering from hepatitis C infected through contaminated blood products during NHS

treatment; and what the cost is of the scheme already operating for haemophiliacs suffering from the HIV virus infected in the same way. [59774]

Mr. Hutton: Approximately £90 million has been paid since 1988 in special payments to people with haemophilia who were infected with HIV through National Health Service treatment with blood or blood products. We estimate that a comparable scheme for hepatitis C infection would cost in the region of £220 million.

Viagra

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the regulations which permit him to ban NHS prescriptions for Viagra. [60196]

Mr. Milburn: Ministers will be drawing up substantive policy proposals on Viagra shortly and, as an interim measure, the Standing Medical Advisory Committee has advised that doctors should not prescribe Viagra.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance on the statutory provisions as they affect private prescriptions issued by NHS GPs to their registered NHS patients for Viagra. [60197]

Mr. Milburn: General practitioners might be in breach of paragraph 43 of their terms of service if they issue private prescriptions for Viagra to patients on their lists. The Department advises that patients requesting private prescriptions should be referred to a doctor outside the practice.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59743]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The Department does not hold any register which is required to be open for inspection by hon. Members and members of the public.

Private Prescriptions

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on private prescriptions issued by NHS general practitioners for their NHS residential patients where the cost of medication is lower than the registered prescription charge. [60035]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service general practitioners might be acting in breach of paragraph 43 of their terms of service if they do not write NHS prescriptions for their NHS patients, except where the drug is included in Schedule 10 or 11 of the NHS (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992.

Overhead Power Lines

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission studies concerning the health effects of emissions from overhead power lines on those living nearby. [59898]

Ms Jowell: Several epidemiological studies are currently under way to investigate childhood cancer in relation to various possible causes, including electromagnetic fields. The largest study of this type in this country is the United Kingdom Childhood Cancer Study which is funded in part by the Department of Health with technical support provided by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). The Department has also recently commissioned a study of childhood cancer and electromagnetic fields from power lines which is being undertaken by the Childhood Cancer Research Group in Oxford.

Dental Services (Shropshire)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on when new NHS dentists' practices will be established in Shropshire. [60157]

Mr. Milburn: Seven investing in dentistry funding requests from Shropshire Health Authority have been approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to help improve the availability of National Health Service dental services in Shropshire. Of the seven approvals, three were for new practices, three were for practice expansions and one was for an emergency dental service. The new practices are in Shrewsbury, Cleobury Mortimer and Dawley, Telford, all of which have now opened. Access to NHS dentistry in the area should also benefit from the first-wave personal dental service pilot in Shropshire, which will start in January 1999.

Calman-Hine Report

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the proposals of the Calman-Hine report; and over what period of time. [59850]

Mr. Hutton: The Calman-Hine report, published in 1995, set out a framework for improving the organisation and delivery of cancer services. This has been supported by the subsequent publication of evidence-based guidance for improving outcomes in breast, colorectal and lung cancer. Guidance on improving outcomes in the gynaecological cancers and cancers of the upper gastro-intestinal tract will be published in 1999. The recommendations in the guidance documents form a set of priorities that help health authorities, hospitals and other providers of care focus on areas most likely to make a difference to the outcomes of care. Substantial progress has already been made across the country in implementing the recommendations. The £10 million made available recurrently for breast cancer in 1997 and for colorectal cancer in 1998 enables targeted investment in workforce and equipment to speed access to diagnosis and treatment and improve quality of care.

Full implementation will take some 10 years and national milestones for the mid implementation period 1999–2002 are currently being worked up. This will include ongoing work in the development of national standards and work being taken forward within primary care.

GP Practices (Dispensing)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review controls on dispensing from GP practices to ensure qualified persons are present when dispensing is carried out. [60195]

Mr. Milburn: We have no plans to review the controls on dispensing from general practitioners practices to ensure qualified persons are present when dispensing is carried out.

Doctors are responsible for the duties they delegate to their practice staff, including the dispensing of medicines. The Court of Appeal recently upheld an earlier decision that doctors may delegate the dispensing of medicines to their practice staff.

Nurses (Prescriptions)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the reports he has commissioned on the issue of nurses being able to prescribe drugs; on what date such reports were received by ministers; and when he expects to publish them. [59837]

Mr. Milburn: The report of the Advisory Group on Nurse Prescribing was published in December 1989 and recommended the introduction of prescribing rights to certain groups of nurses. Following the passage of the Medicinal Products: Prescription by Nurses etc. Act 1992, the recommendations were piloted between 1994 and 1998. An evaluation of the original pilot sites was commissioned from the Universities of Liverpool and York and this was published in January 1997.

Tissue Banks

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the operation and regulation of tissue banks. [59900]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is currently looking into all aspects of the use of human tissue to see whether further regulation is necessary and what form such regulation might take. We hope to be able to consult more widely about this early next year.

Disabled People

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the impact on general practitioners of assisting disabled people to remain in work or move onto benefits; and if he will make a statement. [60165]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* We are considering how best general practitioners can contribute to assisting disabled people to remain in work. The National Priorities Guidance for 1999–2002 included as a national priority

"promoting independence—to ensure the provision of services which help adults achieve and sustain the maximum independence in their lives, including, for those of working age, their capacity to take up, remain in or return to employment".

Statutory Agencies in health and social care will need to consider this priority in setting out their policies. We are discussing with other departments the implications for primary care of policies such as the New Deal for Disabled People and the "single gateway".

Osteoporosis

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve treatment of osteoporosis in women; and if he will make a statement. [60484]

Ms Jowell: On 25 June 1998 I launched an osteoporosis strategy at the sixth Bath Conference on Osteoporosis and Bone Mineral Measurement organised by the National Osteoporosis Society.

The strategy was developed in conjunction with a multi-disciplinary team of health professionals and health managers and the National Osteoporosis Society. It is made up of a number of strands, which taken together provide the basis for a range of actions that might be taken at a national, local and individual level to reduce the number of fractures caused as a result of osteoporosis.

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) have developed evidence-based clinical guidelines on the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis, which are due to be published shortly. From the recommendations of the RCP report a quick reference primary care guide on prevention and treatment has also been produced.

These clearly set out appropriate actions for clinicians, general practitioners and other health professionals to take in patients who have established osteoporosis, and in those at high risk of developing the disease.

Adoption

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to introduce best practice for adoption agencies across the UK; [59470]

(2) what plans he has to reduce the costs to local authorities of placing children with other agencies for adoption; [59471]

(3) what plans he has to amend adoption legislation in England and Wales. [59472]

Mr. Hutton: The Government recently announced the 'Quality Protects' initiative as part of their strategy for improving services for children looked after by local authorities. 'Quality Protects' promotes better management and higher quality in the provision of children's services. So far as adoption is concerned, the programme tackles issues such as the avoidance of children drifting in the care system and also unacceptable delays in placing children for adoption. These issues were also among others addressed in the Local Authority Circular 'Adoption—Achieving the Right Balance', issued on 28 August, copies of which are available in the Library. Local authorities should be in no doubt about the Government's determination to support and monitor the 'Quality Protects' programme.

Through 'Quality Protects', the Government are working with local authorities to improve the management and cost effectiveness of adoption services. For example, greater co-operation among authorities and approved adoption agencies through the wider development of consortia is an effective means of reducing those occasions when a local authority is asked to meet the fees of another adoption agency to enable a child to be placed with a suitable adoptive parent recruited and approved by that agency.

The Government have no plans at present to introduce an adoption Bill for England and Wales. However, we shall do so as soon as parliamentary time allows. In the meantime we are confident that effective action to improve the management and use of adoption services can be taken within the present legislative framework.

Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if NHS purchasers have contracted with Irlen Centre Practitioners for the treatment of scotopic sensitivity syndrome. [60598]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not available in the form required. We are not able to recommend particular service providers centrally. That is a decision to be made at local level taking local needs and factors into account, so health authorities can contract with Irlen Centres if that is in the best interests of the patient.

Radiation (Genetic Damage)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into links between radiation and *(a)* genetic damage and *(b)* genomic instability. [60398]

Ms Jowell: The Department is currently funding three projects into links between radiation and genetic damage and genomic instability within its Radiological Protection Research Programme. The projects are being carried out at the Paterson Institute at the University of Manchester, the Beatson Laboratories in Glasgow and the Medical Research Council Radiation and Genomic Instability Unit in Oxfordshire. The Department is aware that other relevant work is being undertaken by the National Radiological Protection Board, the Medical Research Council, the Cancer Research Campaign and the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research.

Incentive Project Service Payments

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many administrative personnel of the NHS received incentive project service payments in 1997–1998; what was the total cost to the NHS; how many could potentially benefit from IPRs in 1998–99; and what are his budgeted costs for these payments. [60356]

Mr. Milburn: General and senior managers on residual national terms are subject to individual performance review and eligible for performance-related payments (PRP). New national arrangements for National Health Service senior management in health authorities were introduced from 1 April 1998. Under these, whether pay is linked to performance and the way in which it is linked is a matter for local determination. NHS trusts are free to determine their own levels of remuneration, and this extends to rates of PRP.

Health and Safety Legislation (Schools)

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health and safety legislation, including delegated legislation, which applies to children in schools. [59593]

Mr. Meale: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, is mainly concerned with workplace activities and the protection of workers and others who may be affected by such activities; this may include school children. In addition, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 and the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 have applications which cover children in schools. Also the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1996 cover the health, safety and welfare of school children.

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations cover the carrying of weights by children in schools. [59594]

Mr. Meale: I have been asked to reply.

There are no regulations under Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 which specifically cover the carrying of weights by children in schools. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 require, amongst other things, employers to assess the risks arising from work activities which affect the health and safety of those not in their employment, such as school children. This may include any risks arising from manual handling.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 19 November 1998

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59747]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 2 July 1998, *Official Report,* column *258.*

There are no separate arrangements for maintaining registers for inspection by hon. Members and members of the public.

Interchange Initiative

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many individuals have been seconded *(a)* from the Civil Service to industry and *(b)* from industry to the Civil Service under the Interchange initiative, since its establishment. [60028]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Interchange Unit was set up in the Cabinet Office in May 1997 and has collected statistics for the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98. The total number of inward secondments to the civil service from industry for this period was 581; outward secondments to industry numbered 889.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what budget has been allocated to the Interchange initiative for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [60029]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Interchange Unit was allocated a budget of £7,380.00 for 1997–98, and £146,365 for 1998–99. The budget for 1999–2000 has not yet been set but is unlikely to exceed the current figure.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he has taken to promote the Interchange initiative. [60016]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Interchange Unit in the Cabinet Office has been actively involved in encouraging departments to increase their Interchange activity with business, local authorities, health service, academia and small businesses. It has produced a range of publicity material, including a video, aimed at raising awareness and increasing understanding and participation in the initiative. The Unit also took a stand at the Institute of Personnel Development exhibition in Harrogate in October and the CBI conference in Birmingham in November. To publicise the initiative, I hope in the near future to arrange a working breakfast to be attended by a range of key decision makers from all sectors of the economy participating in interchange.

Joint Intelligence Committee

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made since January 1996 in reviewing and releasing the records of the Joint Intelligence Committee; where in the Public Record Office the records are which have been released since then; which years are covered by records which have been released since then; what records are now planned to be reviewed for release; and if he will make a statement. [60289]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Since 1996 JIC minutes and memoranda for the years 1951 to 1955 have been reviewed. Those records found to be no longer sensitive have been transferred to the Public Record Office (PRO) at Kew for release with the following class references—CAB 159/9–21 and CAB 158/12–22.

JIC minutes and memoranda for the years 1956 to 1959 have also been reviewed and those found to be no longer sensitive have recently been transferred to the PRO at Kew for public access in January 1999. These records will have the class references CAB 159/22–32 and CAB 158/23–38.

JIC records for 1960 and later years will continue to be released every year in three-year tranches until the review has been completed.

Liberal Democrats

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the factors which led him to specify particular policy areas as suitable for discussions with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). [60379]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I have not sought to limit the scope of my discussions with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed about our review of the work of the Joint Consultative Committee. However, policy areas which might be discussed at the Committee in future seem likely to be those on which the Government and the Liberal Democrat party have some commonality of agenda and approach.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make it his policy to make public the agenda and minutes of meetings with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) arising from the agreement between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Democrats. [60381]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: No. These documents fall within the exemption for internal discussion and advice under the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information".

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many meetings he has held with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) since 11 November; and how long each lasted. [60434]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I have had one meeting with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed to discuss our review of the work of the Joint Consultative Committee. It took place on 12 November and lasted approximately one hour.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Attorney-General what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60523]

The Attorney-General: There are no non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from my Department.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55554]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* There have been no occasions on which a Minister in my Department has used RAF or privately chartered aircraft during the dates specified.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *202*, if she will list the major partner countries which are monitored by her economic advisers. [60592]

Clare Short: Economic Advisers from the Department for International Development monitor economic events in the following major partner countries:

Africa

Kenya
Uganda
Tanzania
Nigeria
Ghana
Zimbabwe
Zambia
Malawi
Mozambique
South Africa

Asia

India
Pakistan
Bangladesh
China
Nepal

Latin America and the Caribbean

Montserrat

Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union (shared monitoring with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office)

Russia
Ukraine
Poland.

Economic Advisers also monitor a number of developing countries which are not our major partners but where there is DFID involvement. These include countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, other Overseas Dependent Territories, countries in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and other countries in Africa and Asia.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the 10 organisations which receive the greatest amounts of her Department's budget allocated to non-Governmental organisations. [60457]

Clare Short: Information on DFID expenditure through UK NGOs in the current financial year is not yet available. Information on expenditure in 1997–98 is currently being collated and will be available later this year.

In 1996–97, the ten UK NGOs in receipt of the largest amounts of funding from DFID were:

NGO	*£ million*
Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)	22.0
British Red Cross	15.9
Save the Children Fund	13.7
Care International UK	11.5
Oxfam	10.2
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)	8.2
Christian Aid	6.1
Medical Research Council	4.0
London School of Hygiene	3.6
Marie Stopes International (MSI)	3.2

This information is based on the direct funding of UK NGO initiatives and on expenditure channelled through UK NGOs for development activities undertaken on behalf of DFID.

Information on spending through overseas NGOs is not held separately, but is included in DFID's bilateral country programme expenditure.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from her Department. [60524]

Mr. Foulkes: Information on the numbers of people taken on under the New Deal by non-departmental public bodies for which the Department for International Development is responsible is not held centrally.

Central America (Hurricane Mitch)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the use of portable water purification pumps in the area affected by Hurricane Mitch in Central America. [60586]

Mr. Foulkes: The provision of safe drinking water following natural disasters is an important part of the disaster response effort in order to reduce the consequential risk of health epidemics. Ensuring that the significant numbers of affected people in Central America obtain safe drinking water is a major challenge. Equipment such as water purification pumps can be helpful in this respect but the form of response must follow good technical appraisal and be appropriate. The work being carried out by the Red Cross, the Pan American Health Organisation and various non-governmental organisations, supported by the British Government, includes the provision of safe drinking water and other basic health care needs. Their efforts and those of the United Nations have helped prevent a health emergency occurring in the region.

A Department for International Development expert mission is in Honduras and Nicaragua next week and will assess the effective delivery of emergency water supplies.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in her Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to her Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by her Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55561]

Mr. Foulkes: This Question could be answered in full only at disproportionate cost. Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those that applied under the previous Administration.

Between 2 May 1997 and 30 September 1998, Ministers in this Department have used RAF aircraft and private charter aircraft on the following occasions:

Date/journey	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Personnel*
September 1997	Bangladesh	View projects	20
September 1997	Sarajevo	Visit DFID humanitarian aid programmes	1
October 1997	Kenya-Uganda-Rwanda	Visit DFID projects in Entebbe/Soroti/Kigali	8
November 1997	Donetsk	Visit KHF projects in the region	4
January 1998	Malawi	No commercial flight	2
February 1998	Benja Luka-Sarajevo	Visit DFID humanitarian aid programmes	4
May 1998	Guyana	Visit Iwo krame Rainforest project	3
June 1998	Vietnam	Visit DFID projects in Ha Tinh	4
July 1998	South Africa	Visit projects in Bislio, Eastern Cape/Kwa	3
July 1998	Mozambique	Visit projects in Zulu, Natal and Maputo	9
August 1998	Tanzania	Visit DFID projects in Trnga and Mbeya	3

The average cost of the flights taken to make these trips for the 17 months between May 1997 and September 1998 is £5,050 compared to £10,409 under the last year of the previous Administration.

Average cost for the last Administration is made up of 2 flights undertaken by Baroness Chalker.

South East Asia

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has held with IMF officials concerning the impact of the IMF's rescue package of levels of poverty in South East Asia. [58161]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer discussed this and other matters at the recent IMF and World bank meetings in Washington. He emphasised the need for the IMF and World bank to work together in the design of programmes to ensure that Governments have in place policies to strengthen social systems and tackle the social impact of sudden shocks to the financial system, and that the conditions they attach to programmes preserve as far as possible investment in the social, education and employment programmes which are the foundation for growth.

In that respect, he called upon the World bank to develop as a matter of urgency a code of general principles of good practice in social policy, in consultation with other organisations, that should be drawn upon by the IMF and the World bank in developing adjustment programmes in response to crises. Following my right hon. Friend's proposals, the G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors agreed in their recent statement on the world economy that more attention must be given in times of crisis to the effect of economic adjustment on the most vulnerable groups in society.

DEFENCE

RAF Bases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of *(a)* RAF Northolt, *(b)* RAF Uxbridge and *(c)* RAF Bentley Priory. [59847]

Mr. Spellar: The RAF sites at Northolt, Uxbridge and Bentley Priory are currently the subject of a formal rationalisation study which includes all the Defence Estate sites within the Greater London area.

The study team is due to make a report to Ministers at the end of the year.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997; [55545]

(2) if he will list the occasions of ministerial use of RAF aircraft since 1 May 1997 indicating the Minister, the date of trips, the departure and destination points and the costs. [55564]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* This question could be answered in full only at disproportionate cost. Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those which applied under the previous Administration. Between 2 May 1997 and 30 September 1998 Ministers in this department have used RAF aircraft on the occasions which are set out in a table, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

The average cost of the flights taken to meet these trips for the 17 months between May 1997 and September 1998 is £3,910 compared to an average cost of £3,433 in the last year of the previous Administration.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if departments have to pay the full cost to the RAF when Ministers from other departments use RAF planes on official business. [55573]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* When Ministers from all Government departments use RAF aircraft on official business they are charged at a "no-loss" rate (the direct cost excluding overheads). This represents the same charging policy as under the previous administration.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the VIP transport journeys undertaken by the XV108 since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case the *(a)* destination and *(b)* date of each trip; and the names of the VIPs carried together with the number of people accompanying them. [58305]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 5 November 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him today by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, *Official Report*, columns *742–46*, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, *Official Report*, column *808*.

Cadet Forces

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the budget for the cadet forces in the current financial year; what it was for the last financial year; and what the figure will be for the next financial year. [57172]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The budgets for the Cadet Forces for financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99 are as follows:

£ million

	F/Y 1997–98	*F/Y 1998–99*
Sea Cadet Corps	6.37	6.12
Army Cadet Force	27.08	27.48
Air Training Corps	16.76	17.11
Combined Cadet Force	6.16	7.18
Total	56.37	57.89

The Department has not yet finalised its financial planning for 1999–2000. However, as I have already told the House, we have made an increase of some £3 million in the funding for cadets over the next four years.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the parliamentary constituencies out of which cadet forces will be transferred. [60758]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Trident

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what percentage of the computer chips within the Trident system were purchased off the shelf from suppliers; and what percentage were specifically designed and manufactured for the task required; [59930]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* audits and *(b)* action plans completed by his Department on the subject of the Trident system's millennium compliance; [59974]

(3) how many staff are dedicated to ensuring the Trident system's millennium compliance *(a)* within the MoD, *(b)* in the Royal Navy, *(c)* in the Procurement Executive, *(d)* in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and *(e)* in the Atomic Weapons Establishments; and if he will make a statement; [59928]

(4) how many systems have been identified during the year 2000 audit as being critical to the safe and continuous operation of the Trident system; [59972]

(5) what procedures are in place within his Department to ensure the Trident system will not fail on key dates in the computer calendar; [59931]

(6) what discussions have occurred between his Department and his US counterparts to ensure millennium compliance of those parts of the Trident system purchased in the US; and if he will make a statement; [59929]

(7) how much is planned to be spent by *(a)* the MoD, *(b)* the Royal Navy, *(c)* the Procurement Executive, *(d)* the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and *(e)* the AWEs to ensure millennium compliance of the Trident systems; [59973]

(8) if he will list the items being purchased as the UK's share of the FY99 Trident procurement programme; [60017]

(9) how much of the budget being spent in the US on Trident during fiscal year 1999 is for items essential to maintain the continued operational availability of the UK Trident system. [60018]

Mr. George Robertson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Restructuring

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the letter of intent which he signed on 6 July with European defence ministers as part of his initiative on defence restructuring. [51058]

Mr. George Robertson: A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House and copies have been sent to interested parties such as the DIC.

Falkland Islands Garrison (Meat Purchases)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *356*, if he will make a statement on the policy of the military garrision on the Falkland Islands not to purchase for its use mutton and lamb raised on the Falkland Islands. [58713]

Mr. Spellar: Booker's decisions on sourcing products for use by the Armed Forces at home and overseas are based on my Department's requirement that it seek the best prices consistent with meeting our quality specification and assuring continuity of supply. We require it to look to buy British products wherever this cost is effective. I have asked my officials to review the arrangements for the supply of lamb to the Falklands Island Garrison. I shall write to the hon. Member when this review is completed in the New Year.

Navy Vessels (Refits)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on repairs, refits and maintenance of *(a)* HMS 'Ark Royal', *(b)* HMS 'Illustrious' and *(c)* HMS 'Invincible' in each of the last five years. [60828]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Days at Sea

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many operational days *(a)* HMS 'Invincible' and *(b)* HMS 'Illustrious' spent at sea in each of the last five years; [60829]

(2) how many operational days at sea have been undertaken by each of the Royal Navy's submarines, in each of the last five years; [60630]

(3) how many operational days *(a)* HMS 'Ark Royal' and *(b)* HMS 'Intrepid' have spent at sea in each of the last five years. [60629]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Sites (Disposal)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the *(a)* Royal Air Force and *(b)* Royal Navy sites which have been disposed of in each of the last five years, together with the dates of the disposal and the sums received by his Department; [60831]

(2) which of his Department's sites are currently on the market for disposal. [60780]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Army sites which have been disposed of in each of the last five years; with the dates of the disposal and the sums received by his Department. [60752]

Mr. Spellar: Details of site disposals were not collated centrally until April 1997. I will write separately to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the meetings officials from his Department have held with General Pinochet during his current visit to the United Kingdom. [60464]

Mr. Spellar: No such meetings have been held.

Air Force Bases

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the RAF and USAF bases in the United Kingdom that have been closed in the last five years or which are due to be closed under current plans; and what uses are being considered for each site. [60648]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Territorial Army Centre, Stroud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the total planned expenditure on improvements to the TA centre in Stroud; [60787]

(2) what steps he has taken to relocate the two cadet forces currently situated at the TA centre in Stroud; and if he will make it his policy that moneys accruing from the sale of the TA centre in Stroud are re-invested into local cadet forces. [60790]

(3) what plans he has to discuss new locations with the Army cadet force in Stroud; [60784]

(4) what plans he has to value the site of the TA centre in Stroud; [60789]

(5) what moneys have been expended in the last three years on improvements to the TA centre in Stroud; [60786]

(6) if he will publish the criteria by which it was decided to close the Stroud TA centre; [60785]

(7) what was the total planned expenditure on improvements to the TA centre in Stroud, prior to notice being given of the decision to close it. [60788]

(8) what plans he has for consultation with the TA personnel in Stroud on his plans for their transfer. [60783]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Territorial Army

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the parliamentary constituencies from which battalion headquarters are to be transferred leaving no Territorial Army presence; [60757]

(2) if he will list those parliamentary constituencies in which TA centres with cadets will be closed leaving no remaining TA presence. [60759]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

101 Battalion, Chorley

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the estate at Chorley 101 Battalion Headquarters, Lancaster House, Devonshire Road, Chorley after it has been closed. [60760]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60530]

Mr. Spellar: Non-Departmental Public Bodies are encouraged to participate as employers in the New Deal. Information on the numbers of people taken on under New Deal arrangements by Non Departmental Public Bodies is not held centrally.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60377]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him today by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment with responsibility for lifelong learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie).

Nuclear Weapons (Millennium Compliance)

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his counterparts in (i) Russia, (ii) France and (iii) China concerning year 2000 compliance of nuclear weapons systems. [60810]

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been commissioned by his Department into the potential millennium bug risk to the safety of *(a)* nuclear weapons and *(b)* command and control systems. [60795]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friends and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Weapons (Disposal)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *414–15*, on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons in the former Soviet Union, how much financial assistance has been (i) provided to date and (ii) committed in the future, to the International Science and Technology Centre; and how much financial investment has been committed to studying options for the disposal of surplus defence plutonium in Russia; and which British experts are involved in this study and to what timetable they are working. [60683]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Exercise Dimming Sun

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the projected cost of the nuclear weapon exercise Dimming Sun to be held in June 1999; what proportion will be paid for by his Department; what role US military forces will have in this exercise; and if the media will be invited to the exercise. [60719]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Exercise Diagonal Glance

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report arising out of the Diagonal Glance nuclear weapon exercise in September; what was the cost of this exercise; what proportion of the cost of the exercise is to be paid by his Department; and how many press releases were issued about the exercise. [60720]

Mr. Doug Henderson I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the results of the investigation by the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston into a plutonium contamination accident at the establishment on 4 July 1996; [60775]

(2) when the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and Nuclear Safety Directorate of the Health and Safety Executive are next due to inspect the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston; [60774]

(3) when the Radiation Physics Division of the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston was set up; what is the purpose of this division; how many series of technical papers or reports are currently being produced by this division; and what are the names of each series; [60772]

(4) how many times the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the Nuclear Safety Directorate of the Health and Safety Executive have inspected the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston since July 1997; and if he will place a list of the reports of these inspections in the Library, specifying the date on which each report was produced; [60773]

(5) pursuant to his answer of 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *734*, regarding the Atomic Weapons Establishment, if he will place in the Library a list of the papers produced by the Metallic Materials Business Area in the Director Technology Technical reports series which are currently unclassified, indicating the title of each paper and the date on which each paper was produced. [60777]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and for what reasons the Atomic Weapons Establishment Local Liaison Committee was set up; on what basis members are appointed to the committee; and if he will list the current members of the committee. [60776]

Mr. Spellar: The Local Liaison Committee was set up in 1993 to provide a means by which the Atomic Weapons Establishment, AWE, could discuss with representatives of local authorities matters of community interest and concern relating to AWE's operation. County, District, Town and parish Councils within AWE's local area are invited to be represented on the Committee. The Councils represented are:

Hampshire County Council

West Berkshire Council

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

Reading Borough Council

Wokingham District Council

Tadley Town Council

Aldermaston Parish Council

Baughurst Parish Council

Beech Hill Parish Council

Brimpton Parish Council

Burghfield Parish Council

Mortimer West End Parish Council

Padworth Parish Council

Pamber Parish Council

Pangbourne Parish Council

Purley-on-Thames Parish Council

Shinfield Parish Council

Silchester Parish Council

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

Sulhampstead Parish Council

Theale Parish Council

Ufton Nervet Parish Council

Wasing Parish Council

Wokefield Parish Council

Woolhampton Parish Council.

Representation is a matter for the Councils concerned. The meetings are chaired by AWE's Chief Executive and senior staff attend as required. The secretary is a member of AWE's staff.

Civilianisation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many posts staffed by military personnel within his Department have been civilianised in each of the last three years. [55819]

Mr. Spellar The first year that a centrally managed count of civilianised posts was undertaken was 1995. In that year, aggregate figures were collated in respect of the number of posts civilianised since 1990. Since that time, annual totals have been assembled in December of each year. The latest available figures are:

Year	*Number*
1990–95	2,800
1996	1,143
1997	847

Chief of Staff Meetings

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the Chiefs of Staff have met since 21 July; and if he will place in the Library a list of items discussed at each of these meetings. [60722]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Admiralty and Army Boards

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *468*, what items were discussed at the meetings of *(a)* the Army Board in July 1997 and *(b)* the Admiralty Board in June 1997. [60721]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Council

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the Defence Council has met since 20 July; and if he will place in the Library a list of items discussed at each of these meetings. [60723]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Newsletters (Security Classification)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the current security classifications are of the newsletters produced for the staff of *(a)* the RAF Personnel Management Agency, *(b)* the Logistic Information Systems Agency, *(c)* the Defence Dental Agency and *(d)* the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre; how often each newsletter is produced; and when each newsletter was first produced. [60771]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executives of the Agencies concerned. I have asked the Chief Executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from S. J. Lloyd to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 19 November 1998:

I am replying to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about Agency Staff Newsletters as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre Defence Agency.

There were three questions posed concerning the classification, frequency of production and the date of initial issue of the publication.

The Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre Defence Agency newsletter entitled 'Lynx' is an unclassified document produced as a suggested management aid to the move to Agency status. Its continued production is in support of the communication activity linked to retention of Investors In People accreditation.

The publication is produced on a quarterly basis. To date there have been seven editions with issue number eight almost ready to go to press.

The first edition was issued in the Autumn of 1996.

I hope that the above answers fully the questions posed.

Letter from I. G. McIntyre to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 19 November 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the publication of newsletters as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency.

The Defence Dental Agency produces an unclassified Newsletter on a quarterly basis. The first issue was produced in September 1996. The Newsletter is supplemented by a further unclassified publication known as "Root Issues".

Letter from Alan Cowpe to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 19 November 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the publication of newsletters, as this matters falls within the responsibility of the Air Secretary as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Personnel Management Agency. The Air Secretary is absent on duty so I am replying on his behalf.

The RAF Personnel Management Agency produces an unclassified newsletter on a monthly basis. The first newsletter was produced in October 1996.

Letter from P. A. Flanagan to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 19 November 1998:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the current security classification of the newsletter produced by the Logistic Information Systems Agency, how often it is produced and when it was first produced.

The newsletter, called Insight, has no security classification, it is produced 6 times a year and was first produced in November 1997. The newsletter is distributed internally to all members of staff.

Additionally the Training and Personnel Division produce an unclassified monthly newsletter, this was first produced in June 1997, this is distributed monthly to all LISA staff.

HMS Ocean

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on repairs and maintenance on HMS 'Ocean' since her launch. [60631]

Mr. Spellar: As I said in my answers to the hon. Member on 11 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *638*, and 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *12*, HMS Ocean was damaged on launch and a package of repairs costing some £1.125 million was needed. The cost of these repairs was borne by MOD under its indemnity scheme. HMS Ocean was subsequently dry-docked at Portsmouth and further repairs were undertaken to her tail shaft bearings and 'A' bracket bearings. The cost of, and liability for, these repairs is currently the subject of a Board of Inquiry and is not expected to be resolved before the end of the year. If MOD accepts liability for the costs involved, the information will be publicly available in the usual way. In addition, approximately £20k was incurred to repair one of the ship's switchboards and this will be recovered by the Prime Contractor under the contract.

As part of her acceptance, HMS Ocean was the subject of a programme of defect rectification under an agreed procedure with the Prime Contractor. This process is common to the acceptance of all warships and the costs incurred are predominantly the responsibility of the Prime Contractor. Although this process is still underway, no costs have so far been borne by MOD.

HMS Ocean has not required maintenance beyond planned routine work since her launch. We do not maintain a complete record of this maintenance centrally and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Allivane

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors led to his Department's intervention in the affairs of Allivane in relation to defence contracts. [60814]

Mr. Spellar: I am not aware that any such intervention took place.

RAF Brize Norton

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the daily cost is of keeping non-RAF planes on stand-by for foreign Governments at RAF Brize Norton. [60462]

Mr. Spellar: Except in circumstances where reciprocal arrangements exist, aircraft of a foreign government making use of any MOD airfield, including RAF Brize Norton, are normally required to pay appropriate landing,

parking, and handling fees, and to meet the full costs of any additional support required, thus avoiding any direct costs falling to my Department.

HMS Intrepid

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on repairs, refits and maintenance of HMS 'Intrepid' in each of the last five years. [60632]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Aircrew

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircrew in the United Kingdom forces were born in Scotland; how many are pilots of *(a)* combat aircraft, *(b)* transport aircraft and *(c)* helicopters by arm of the service, and how many are other aircrew by (i) arm of service and (ii) function. [55406]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Black Boxes

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the design parameters of black boxes. [60477]

Mr. Spellar: Design parameters of Flight Data Recorders and Cockpit Voice Recorders (generally known as 'Black Boxes', are set out in Defence Standards 00–970 'Design and Airworthiness Requirements for Service Aircraft'. These are kept under review to reflect civil and military experience and are aligned with relevant civil requirements as defined by the European Organisation for Civil Aviation Equipment (EUROCAE).

Riot Control Agents

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *230*, on riot control agents, if his Department has completed its review of the quantity of CS gas which it holds. [60329]

Mr. Spellar: The MOD has now completed its review of CS gas holdings, which has confirmed a continuing requirement for CS gas as part of a generic, non-lethal weapon capability for operational deployments, and for use in NBC training. Stockholdings will be consistent with the identified requirement.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judge Fingret

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what race awareness course Judge Fingret has attended since his appointment to the Bench. [60326]

Mr. Hoon: Judge Fingret was appointed a Circuit Judge in 1992. He attended a seminar on ethnic minority issues organised by the Ethnic Minorities Advisory Committee of the Judicial Studies Board on 28 and 29 March 1996.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will call for a report on the statement made by Judge Fingret at the Old Bailey case on the sentences of Timothy Heat and Jason Huczek. [60325]

Mr. Hoon: Judge Fingret's remarks as to whether this had been a racially motivated offence were made in the context of deciding the appropriate level of sentence. Judges are free to reach such decisions without interference from Government ministers and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to ask the Judge for a report.

High Court Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many high court judges he has appointed who are *(a)* Asian and *(b)* black. [60327]

Mr. Hoon: As at 1 November 1998 there were 98 High Court Judges. No Asian or black judges have been appointed to the High Court Bench either before or after May 1997.

Asylum Appeals

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reasons the Chief Adjudicator of the Immigration Appellate Authority transferred asylum appeals out of London to provincial hearing centres. [60255]

Mr. Hoon: The Chief Adjudicator considers that it is in the appellant's best interest that a claim falling within the Refugee Convention is recognised as soon as possible, just as it is in the public interest that claims not falling within the Convention are similarly determined within a reasonable time. Therefore it was unreasonable for appellants to wait for up to a year for a hearing in London, when hearing dates were available in provincial centres within six to eight weeks.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department which interested parties the Chief Adjudicator of the Immigration Appellate Authority consulted before bringing forward asylum appeals and transferring asylum appeals to provincial hearing centres. [60257]

Mr. Hoon: The proposal was discussed at an Immigration Appellate Authority Users Meeting in July which was attended by representatives from the Refugee Legal Centre, Immigration Advisory Service, the Immigration Law Practioners' Association and other interested parties.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what studies are being made of the effects on asylum seekers of the transfer of asylum appeals to provincial hearing centres. [60256]

Mr. Hoon: Although no study has yet taken place by the Immigration Appellate Authority it is monitoring the extent to which appellants whose cases are transferred are

unrepresented at their hearing. The hearings of the transferred cases have only just started so it is too soon to draw any conclusions.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what monitoring he is carrying out of the effect that bringing forward appeals is having on the Refugee Legal Centre. [60254]

Mr. Hoon: No monitoring is being carried out by the Lord Chancellor's Department. It is for the Refugee Legal Centre to notify the Immigration Appellate Authority of any problems that this policy causes them.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what monitoring he is carrying out of the effect that transfer of asylum appeals to provincial centres is having on legal representation at asylum appeals. [60253]

Mr. Hoon: The Immigration Appellate Authority is keeping a record of the number of appellants whose cases are transferred and who are unrepresented at their hearings. However, the hearings of the transferred cases have only just started so it is too soon to draw any conclusions about the effect on legal representation. The information will be used to report to the Chief Adjudicator on the effect of the initiative.

Civil Court Fees

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what principles will underpin the new civil court fees structure which will accompany the unified rules of court to be introduced next April; and if he will make a statement. [60833]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor issued a discussion paper in February 1998 and has concluded in the light of the responses that the civil court fee structure will be based on the following key principles.

Court fees should not act as a barrier to access to justice. Litigants should not expect the taxpayer to pay for the court services they use, if they can afford to do so themselves. We shall continue to provide protection for the less well-off through a system of exemptions and remissions. In addition, fees for Children Act 1989 applications, adoptions, and domestic violence injunctions will be subsidised by the taxpayer. All other fees will be set to recover the full cost of the service provided.

Fees will broadly match the cost of the service for which they are charged. Within civil proceedings, fees payable on issuing a claim will be banded according to the value of the claim and will still be used to defray the bulk of the cost of proceedings. Litigants will pay fees which match the average cost of the service for which they are charged, rather than the specific costs of their particular case. Fees will be paid by the claimant, or where a specific application has been made, by the applicant, and will be paid in advance.

A structure based on these principles will be fairer than the present one. It will encourage and enable litigants to make responsible choices about whether to proceed, while ensuring that the taxpayer's contribution is clearly targeted on the people who really need it.

The Court Service is publishing a consultation paper today on the charging points and the levels at which fees should be set. The paper, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, includes proposals that separate fees will be set for the main stages of the new civil procedures, introducing charging points at allocation and listing.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55555]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* This question could be answered in full only at disproportionate cost. Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those that applied under the previous Administration.

No such costs have been incurred in the 17 months between May 1997 and September 1998 compared to an average cost of £3,094.00 for flights by RAF Aircraft under the last year of the previous Administration.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people he has employed in his Department under the New Deal arrangements. [60370]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to himby the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment with responsibility for Life Long Learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie), on 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *755*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Common Market Referendum

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *59*, if he will make a statement on his policy on the preservation of material of historical value held on file by the security services relating to the 1975 referendum on United Kingdom membership of the Common Market. [60444]

Mr. Straw: The responsibility for decisions on the destruction of Security Service files rests with the Director General. The criteria which the Service applies in deciding whether to retain files on the grounds of historical interest were listed in my reply to a question from the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis)

on 20 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns *519–20*. The criteria are currently being reviewed by the Advisory Council on Public Records.

Sexual Services Advertisements

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the law on newspaper classified advertisements relating to the offering of sexual services; and if he will make a statement. [60417]

Mr. Boateng: We have no such plans. We shall, however, shortly be issuing a consultation paper on proposals to strengthen the criminal law in relation to the nuisance of prostitutes' calling cards in public telephone boxes.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60366]

Mr. Straw: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60525]

Mr. Straw: Non-Department Public Bodies (NDPBs) are encouraged to participate as employers in New Deal. Information on the numbers of people taken under New Deal by NDPBs is not held centrally.

Human Rights

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on his Department's review of those international human rights treaties which the United Kingdom has not yet fully ratified; if human rights groups in the United Kingdom have been consulted about their views; when the results of the review will be announced; and if detailed reasons will be given for decisions, with particular reference, in each case, to protocols 4 and 7 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the first and second optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. [60415]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We expect work on the review to be completed by the end of the year. A number of human rights groups have already submitted their views, either in the context of work on the Human Rights Bill, or in response to the announcement of the review. Any other group wishing to submit views should do so as soon as possible.

We will announce the outcome of the review to the House, with a summary of the issues and the decisions.

Compensation Claims

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost to public funds of claims by employees and the public for compensation in respect of *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* employment protection in the last year for which figures are available. [59058]

Mr. Straw: There are no centrally maintained records for all these types of compensation. Delegation of personnel functions and of authority to make such awards has resulted in less central record keeping. To obtain all the information requested would require an extensive trawl of personnel records which could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Awards under section 11 of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme, in respect of personal injury to employees, totalled £822,594 during the period April 1998-September 1998. Compensation awarded by the Civil Service Appeal Board totalled £26,270 during the year 1997–98.

Traffic Police

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has made of *(a)* the number of traffic police officers and *(b)* expenditure on traffic police, within (i) the Metropolitan Police and (ii) UK police budgets as a whole (1) at the latest available date and (2) five years ago. [59894]

Kate Hoey: The information requested as regards England and Wales is not collected centrally and could be obtained, from each police force, only at disproportionate cost. The allocation of resources to different functions is an operational matter for individual Chief Constables.

Traffic policing does not necessarily occur independently of other police work and the number of officers deployed to the traffic division is not indicative of the money spent on traffic policing. A large part of traffic officers' time is spent dealing with ordinary crime. It is an advantage that traffic officers deal with matters unrelated to traffic and that beat officers will also deal with traffic offences, thus contributing to more efficient ways of policing.

The Commissioner tells me that an internal review showed that there were 760 traffic officers in Metropolitan Police in June 1998, costing £39,436,913. There are no reliable figures available for the number of traffic officers employed five years ago. However, there were 875 traffic officers in post before the Metropolitan Police Service's restructuring in April 1994, at an estimated cost of £41,617,204.

Injuries and Deaths (London)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the incidence of *(a)* injury and *(b)* death in the Metropolitan Police area, in terms of recorded annual numbers per 1,000 of the population, arising from (i) traffic accidents and (ii) assaults and other violent crimes. [59878]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has supplied the following figures for 1997–98:

Total Numbers

	Personal injury road traffic accidents	*Assaults/violent crimes*
Injury	40,046	49,785
Death	275	[1]174

[1] Excludes all causing death by dangerous driving cases, of which there were 29 deaths recorded in 1997–98.

Note:

Per 1,000 of the population based on the Office for National Statistics mid-year estimate for 1996 for the Metropolitan Police District (7,564,200).

	Personal injury road traffic accidents	*Assaults/violent crimes*
Injury	5.29	6.58
Death	0.04	[1]0.02

[1] Excludes all causing death by dangerous driving cases, of which there were 29 deaths recorded in 1997–98.

Bullwood Prison

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute an inquiry into security procedures at Bullwood Prison, Hockley, following the findings of the police investigation. [60337]

Mr. George Howarth: There were two police investigations into the death of Ms O'Dwyer. The first, a routine investigation, concluded that there were no suspicious circumstances. A second investigation was undertaken following the adjournment of the inquest when allegations were made that a witness had committed perjury. The matter was referred to the Crown Prosecution Service who have decided not to proceed further.

The Prison Service is considering the outcome of the Coroner's inquest together with the findings of its own internal investigation. I am content that this constitutes a satisfactory examination of procedures at Bullwood Hall.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the findings of the internal inquiry conducted by the Governor of Bullwood Prison, Hockley, into the circumstances surrounding the death of the prisoner Josie O'Dwyer. [60336]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service is currently reviewing the policy on disclosure of internal investigation reports. The aim is to provide a protocol which will allow disclosure as soon as possible after the report is completed. When the revised policy is introduced, it will not apply retrospectively.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many decisions have been made to date on asylum applications made between 1 July 1993 and 31 December 1995 as a result of the measures announced in the White Paper, Fairer Faster and Firmer; and how many of these decisions were for an outright refusal of the claim; [60030]

(2) how many decisions have been made to date on pre-Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 asylum applications as a result of the measures announced in the White Paper Fairer, Faster and Firmer; and how many of these decisions did not result in the granting of indefinite leave to enter or remain in the UK; [60100]

(3) how many applications for asylum have been determined in each month of 1998 to date; how many of these decisions were for *(a)* a grant of asylum and *(b)* exceptional leave to remain, excluding any decisions made under the arrangements for dealing with the pre-Asylum and Immigration Act 1993 and pre-1996 cases announced in the White Paper, Fairer, Faster and Firmer. [60099]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I will write to the hon. Member.

Private Investigation Agencies

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to regulate private investigation agencies; and if he will make a statement. [59890]

Mr. Boateng: We intend to introduce statutory regulation which will be able to be applied to the whole of the private security industry, including private detectives, as soon as possible. We hope to bring forward firm proposals shortly.

Refugees (Slovakia and Czech Republic)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons from *(a)* Slovakia and *(b)* the Czech Republic have awarded (i) refugee status and (ii) extended leave to remain since May 1997. [60011]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I will write to the hon. Member.

Islamic Organisations

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the following organisations are known to operate in the United Kingdom: *(a)* Al-Ansar al-Shariah, *(b)* Al-Gamaa al Islaamiya, *(c)* Algerian Groupe Islamique Armee, *(d)* Al-Marsad al-l'lami al islami, *(e)* Al-Muhajir, *(f)* Al-Muhajiroun, *(g)* Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights in Saudi Arabia, *(h)* Filisteen al-Muslima, *(i)* Front Islamique de Salvation, *(j)* Hamas, *(k)* Hizbollah, *(l)* Hizb-ut-Tahrir, *(m)* Islamic Jihad, *(n)* Nassiha wal-Isla, *(o)* Bahraini Freedom Movement, *(p)* Bahrain Liberation Front and *(q)* Islamic Observation Centre; and if (i) Ministers and (ii) officials have met representatives of the organisations. [60229]

Mr. Straw: I understand that, of the organisations listed, none has official offices in the United Kingdom. However, Al-Muhajiroun, the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights in Saudi Arabia, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Bahraini Freedom Movement and the Bahrain Liberation Front operate publicly in the United Kingdom.

It may be that there have been contacts with individual members, but neither Home Office Ministers nor officials have had formal meetings with any of these organisations.

CS Sprays

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Police Scientific Development Branch started research into the possibility

of using alternative solvents in CS sprays; when this work is expected to be completed; and if the report of the results of this research will be made public. [60292]

Mr. Boateng: The Police Scientific Development Branch has been looking at potential solvents since the beginning of the programme to review the use of incapacitants for police use in 1994. A number of studies have been performed, including one by CBD Porton Down in July 1996, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. To date, no suitable alternative to Methyl Iso-butyl Ketone (MIBK) has been found, although work is still progressing.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been undertaken by his Department since 1968 on the interaction between CS gas spray and psychotropic medication; what were the results of this research; and what research his Department intends to conduct on this topic in the future. [60291]

Mr. Boateng: There has been no research undertaken by this Department on this subject and there is none planned at present. I understand that CS is a peripheral sensory irritant and therefore unlikely to have any adverse effect on those using psychotropic drugs, as by the time CS reaches the bloodstream it will be rapidly hydrolysed (broken down by water).

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* members of the public have started legal proceedings because of injuries caused by CS sprays since January 1995; and if he will make a statement. [60332]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not kept centrally.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's guidelines for the use of CS cartridges and grenades by police forces in dealing with serious disorder. [60290]

Mr. Boateng: The guidelines have in the past been classified. The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information exempts from disclosure information that would harm national security or defence but I do not believe the guidelines come within this category. The guidelines have therefore been declassified and I am placing a copy in the Library.

CR Tear Gas

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times police forces have used CR tear gas in public since 1968; on what dates CR gas was used in public; for what reasons; and in what circumstances police forces have been authorised to use CR tear gas in public since 1968. [60331]

Mr. Boateng: CR gas is not issued to police forces in the United Kingdom.

Co-ordinating Committee of Senior Officials

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* draft conventions and *(b)* proposals for a convention, under discussion in the Co-ordinating Committee of Senior Officials established under article K4 of the Treaty of Maastricht. [60096]

Kate Hoey: Three draft conventions are under discussion within the framework of the Justice and Home Affairs Council at present. They are the draft Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters between member states of the European Union, the draft Eurodac Convention and the draft Convention on Rules for the Admission of Third Country Nationals into the European Union. No proposals for further such conventions are under discussion at present.

Radioactive Gases (Cap La Hague)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Channel Islands about radiation emissions from the nuclear power station at Cap La Hague. [60111]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We received representations about possible radiation emissions from Cap La Hague from Guernsey in May 1998 and from Jersey in June 1998. The representations were communicated to the French Government. We have also had correspondence and discussions with the Channel Islands on other nuclear matters.

EU Home and Justice Convention

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *74–76*, if he will list those conventions agreed under article K3 of the Maastricht Treaty, additional to the seven already agreed by that date; and if he will indicate for each the provision for adjudication by the Court of Justice and scrutiny of each carried out by Parliament. [60095]

Kate Hoey: Three conventions have been agreed under Article K3 of the Maastricht Treaty since 1 July 1997. They are:

1. Convention on Driving Disqualifications (agreed 17 June 1998)

The purpose of this convention is to provide a mechanism whereby a driving disqualification imposed by one European Union (EU) member state on a resident of another member state may be enforced by the latter state when the driver returns to that state. Enforcement by the driver's own state will normally have the effect of removing his right to drive anywhere in the EU and beyond, during the currency of the ban.

The draft convention was sent to the House of Lords European Communities Committee for scrutiny on 24 November 1997 and was finally cleared from scrutiny on 12 March 1998. United Kingdom legislation will be required before it can be ratified.

Provision for adjudication by the European Court of Justice is contained in Article 14 of the convention. This allows for the Court to rule on any dispute between member states (which the European Council has been unable to resolve within six months), or between member states and the Commission, regarding the interpretation or application of the convention. It also allows for member states to accept the court's jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings on interpretation.

2. Convention on Jurisdiction, Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments in Matrimonial Matters (Brussels II convention) (agreed 28 May 1998).

The purpose of this convention is to lay down rules on jurisdiction and on the recognition and enforcement of judgments in certain matrimonial matters between member states. The House of Lords Committee on the European Communities examined an early draft in great detail, and took written and oral evidence. The Committee also saw and cleared from scrutiny a late draft of the convention.

Provision for adjudication by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) is contained in a separate protocol to the convention, which each member state has the option whether or not to ratify. The protocol provides for competent authorities in the member states to refer issues to the court where there is a conflict of jurisprudence, either between member states or between a member state and the Commission. Ratification of the convention will require amendment of primary legislation in the United Kingdom; this is not a priority at present. No decisions have yet been taken on whether the United Kingdom will ratify the protocol on ECJ jurisdiction.

3. Convention on Mutual Assistance and Co-operation between Customs Administration (agreed 18 December 1997).

The draft text of the 'Naples II' Convention was considered by the House of Lords European Communities Committee during November and December 1997 and cleared from scrutiny on 17 December 1997.

Under Article 26 of the convention, the European Court of Justice will have jurisdiction to resolve disputes between member states, and between a member state and the Commission, in relation to the interpretation or application of the convention where the Council is itself unable to do so within six months. In addition, jurisdiction may be conferred on the court by a member state which makes a declaration to this effect, enabling its courts and tribunals to refer questions concerning interpretation of the convention for a preliminary ruling. This jurisdiction will be similar to that described in Article 177 of the EC Treaty. The United Kingdom does not intend to make such a declaration.

Social Policy Protocol

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application of Protocol 14 of the Treaty of Maastricht, on Social Policy, to the United Kingdom; and what steps have been taken to ensure that the provisions of the social policy are applied in the Isle of Man. [60258]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government fully support the inclusion of the Agreement on Social Policy (Protocol 14) in the Amsterdam Treaty as the new Social Chapter, and will implement the measures already agreed under it.

European Union rules apply to the Isle of Man only to the limited extent set out in Protocol 3 of the Treaty of Accession. Broadly speaking, this includes customs matters and certain aspects of the common agricultural policy. Protocol 14 of the Treaty of Maastricht does not fall within the scope of Protocol 3 of the Treaty of Accession.

Council Directives

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application of Council Directives *(a)* 96/34/EC, *(b)* 93/104/EEC, *(c)* 91/533/EC and *(d)* 90/270/EEC. [60088]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Fire Safety

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government will take to take forward the proposals in the document, Fire Safety Legislation for the Fut[illegible] [60190]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *254–55*. It remains our intention to reform fire safety legislation along the lines set out in the consultation document "Fire Safety Legislation for the Future" as soon as is practicable.

Crown Dependencies (Financial Regulation)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the report of the Edwards Review of Financial Regulation in the Crown Dependencies will be made publicly available. [60838]

Mr. Straw: The United Kingdom Government and the authorities in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man welcome Andrew Edwards' report on financial regulation, which has been laid before the House today. The report is being placed in the Library and copies are also available in the Vote Office. The report, which has been produced in consultation with the Islands, contains detailed accounts of the legislation and regulatory arrangements on Jersey, Guernsey and the isle of Man respectively. It confirms that the arrangements in place conform in large measure to the internationally accepted standards of financial regulation.

The report also concludes that there are a number of changes which could raise standards still further, both in the United Kingdom itself and in the Crown Dependencies. In many cases, these conclusions are in line with policies which are already being developed. The United Kingdom Government and the Island authorities have agreed to meet in January 1999 to begin the task of examining systematically the conclusions of the Edwards Report and the plans of action being drawn up by the Islands and the United Kingdom in response to those conclusions. This programme will include new arrangements, under the chairmanship of my noble Friend the Minister of State, for all the parties to meet jointly on a regular basis to take stock of progress. These meetings will take place alternately in London and in one of the Crown Dependencies.

The United Kingdom and the Island authorities believe that the Edwards review and the follow up action on its conclusions should further strengthen effective financial regulation in the Islands and, in so doing, contribute to the long term health of the Island economies.

Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and the Zoo Licensing Act 1984 to cover Northern Ireland. [60847]

Mr. George Howarth: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Special Constables

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the re-application process required of special constables who move to a new police area. [60642]

Mr. Boateng: The Working Group which reviewed the Special Constabulary in England and Wales during 1995–96 was aware that, in cases where a special constable wished to transfer from one force to another, the officer was required to resign from his current special constabulary and apply to his new force, undergoing the full recruitment process. The Group saw no reason why a

special constable should have to resign in these circumstances and suggested that each force should have procedures and policies to administer transfers between forces, whilst recognising that it is ultimately for the chief officer of the receiving force whether to accept or reject the officer.

Following the Working Group's report, the Home Office and representatives of several special constabularies developed guidance to facilitate transfers between forces. This guidance was presented to, and endorsed by, delegates at the Special Constabulary National Conference in March 1998. It was subsequently ratified by the Standing Committee on the Special Constabulary at its inaugural meeting this month, and it will shortly be disseminated to chief officers by way of a Home Office circular.

Extradition Requests

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used in the determination of an extradition request *(a)* prior to the magistrates' court hearing and *(b)* after the court has granted the request. [60588]

Mr. Straw: I will write to my hon. Friend.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conditions were placed on General Pinochet's recent entry to the United Kingdom. [60499]

Mr. Straw: Senator Pinochet was granted leave to enter for six months' Employment and recourse to public funds was prohibited, in accordance with the Rules.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the extradition requests received concerning General Pinochet; and if he will make a statement. [60466]

Mr. Straw: I received a formal request for the extradition of Senator Pinochet from the Spanish Government on 11 November 1998. Later the same day, I received a formal request from the Swiss Government. I received a formal request for the extradition of Senator Pinochet from the French Government on 13 November 1998.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions with the Chilean authorities were held by officials of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Immigration Service prior to the entry of General Pinochet to the United Kingdom from Chile. [60465]

Mr. Straw: No such discussions were held by officials of my Department, including those in the Immigration Service, prior to the entry of Senator Pinochet.

Women's Land Army

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that the Women's Land Army are represented in the parade in Whitehall in 1999's Remembrance Sunday service. [60439]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I understand from the Royal British Legion who are responsible for organising the march past the Cenotaph which follows the official ceremony on Remembrance Sunday, that they intend to make proposals which will allow greater participation in future years by non ex-Service groups and individuals.

Theft

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* domestic burglaries, *(b)* vehicle thefts and *(c)* thefts from a vehicle were recorded in (i) 1995, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1997 in Staffordshire; and what were the clear-up rates for each offence. [60244]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police: Staffordshire

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
Burglary in a dwelling	12,090	12,395	11,272
Percentage cleared up	30	34	37
Theft/unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle	8,775	8,487	7,128
Percentage cleared up	26	28	27
Theft from vehicle	14,970	13,415	13,468
Percentage cleared up	20	22	19

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average age of people convicted of *(a)* vehicle theft and *(b)* domestic burglary in Staffordshire in the last year for which figures are available. [60245]

Mr. Boateng: Provisional information for 1997 on the number of offenders convicted at all courts in the Staffordshire Police Force Area by age is given in the table.

Number of persons convicted at all courts of (a) vehicle theft [1] and (b) domestic burglary in the Staffordshire Police Force Area by age, 1997 [2]

Age	*Vehicle theft [1]*	*Domestic burglary*
10	—	—
11	1	—
12	2	1
13	3	1
14	6	12
15	16	12
16	32	18
17	31	25
18	29	30
19	24	28
20	27	33
21	10	26
22	14	28
23	8	22
24	6	24
25 and under 30	24	59
30 and under 40	15	26
40 and under 50	4	7
50 and under 60	1	1
60 and over	—	—
All ages	253	353

[1] Vehicle theft includes the *indictable offences* of (i) aggravated vehicle taking (injury to person, damage to property of car) and (ii) theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle; and the *summary offences* of (i) stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance and (ii) aggravated vehicle taking where criminal damage amounted to £2,000 or under.

[2] Provisional.

[3] Includes persons, convicted of summary offences, given the default age of 25 where the exact age was not known.

Amsterdam Treaty

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which treaty articles, subsequent to the coming into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam, will provide powers enabling officials of the Government to *(a)* question, *(b)* examine the belongings of, *(c)* search and *(d)* detain any persons possessing documents purporting to show that they are citizens of (i) the European Union and (ii) a state being part of the European Economic Area. [60681]

Kate Hoey: I will write to my hon. Friend.

National Assembly for Wales

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has with regard to the deposits to be paid by candidates standing for (i) constituency seats and (ii) list seats for the National Assembly for Wales; and what plans he has to set expenditure limits on the election campaigns of such candidates, with particular reference to the position of candidates who may appear on both the constituency and list nominations. [60715]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I will write to the right hon. Member.

Police Helicopters

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ban flights by police helicopters in London between the hours of 11 pm and 6 am. [60634]

Mr. Boateng: The use of police helicopters is governed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), as outlined in Civil Air Publication 612 (Police Air Operations Manual Part 1). This publication sets out the joint CAA/Home Office policy for the conduct of police air operations.

There are no restrictions on the times during which police helicopters, or any other helicopters, are allowed to fly. The deployment of the helicopter is an operational matter for the Commissioner.

The Commissioner tells me that the Metropolitan Police have a self imposed limitation on when they fly at night. This limitation runs from 2am until 10am. Only when a life is likely to be saved will the helicopter fly during this period.

Research Papers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each series of research papers which his Department currently produces. [60691]

Mr. Straw: Several Directorates and Units within the Home Office currently produce research papers:

Research, Development and Statistics Directorate produce the following series:

- Home Office research studies
- LOVAS (Local Voluntary Activity Surveys)
- 'Made availables' (background information to the Home Office research studies)
- Occasional papers
- Research findings

Research, Development and Statistics Directorate also produce the following statistical series:

- Aspects of crime
- Bulletins
- Digest (information on the Criminal Justice System, England and Wales)
- Findings
- Key Statistic Booklets
- Section 95 Publications
- Sentencing patterns England and Wales

Police and Reducing Crime Unit produce papers in the following series:

- Briefing notes series
- Police Research Award Scheme series
- Police research series
- Special interest series

Fire Research and Development Group (FRDG) produce:

- FRDG research reports
- CFBAC (Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council) research reports

Drugs Prevention Initiative produces a series of research papers entitled Drug Prevention Initiative papers.

Police Scientific and Development Branch produces a series of technical reports covering a wide range of its work.

Prisoners (Amenities)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Kingston Prison is to be included in the initiative to install televisions in prisoners' cells; and if he will make a statement. [60791]

Mr. George Howarth: All prison establishments in England and Wales are included in the initiative and will in due course provide in-cell television as an earned privilege. Installation of in-cell televisions will take place on a rolling basis over an initial three year period. Kingston is not included in the 80 establishments installing in-cell television this financial year.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria the prison service uses in denying prisoners access to books which are publicly available. [60015]

Mr. George Howarth: Prisoners are normally allowed to receive, or make arrangements to purchase, books while in prison; to have access to the prison library; and to have at least three books in their possession at any one time, subject to the volumetric limits that apply to prisoners' property.

However, there are a number of grounds on which access to publications may be limited or denied. These are:

(i) Governors have discretion to withhold or withdraw any publication if it constitutes a risk to security or good order or discipline, or where the medical officer considers that possession of the material is likely to have an adverse effect on the prisoner's physical or mental condition;

(ii) prisoners may have access to publications/library facilities withdrawn for a limited period following an adjudication for an offence against discipline (although access to approved religious books would not be removed in such circumstances);

(iii) under the national incentives and earned privileges policy the number of books prisoners may hold, and frequency of visits to the library, may increase or decrease depending upon the privilege level which the prisoner concerned has attained; and

(iv) where a prisoner has requested a book which is not available in the prison library, attempts will be made to obtain it through the inter library loan system or, if necessary, the British Library. It is possible in such circumstances that there may be delays in obtaining the requested publication and a limit on its availability to the prisoner once obtained.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55553]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* This Question could be answered in full only at disproportionate cost. Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those that applied under the previous Administration.

Between 2 May 1997 and 30 September 1998, Ministers in this Department have used RAF aircraft on the following occasions:

Date	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Numbers accomp. Minister*
May 1997	Brussels	Meeting with Spanish & German Ministers	3
July 1997	Cardiff	To address ACPO[1] function	2
September 1997	Teesside	Youth Justice Workshop	1
October 1997	Luxembourg	Meeting with Irish Justice Minister and Home Affairs Council meeting	2
December 1997	Sarajevo & Split	Visit British Police serving in Bosnia	2
December 1997	Banja Luka	Visit Police serving in Bosnia	2
August 1998	Belfast	Various meetings	2

[1] ACPO Association of Chief Police Officers

The average cost of the flights taken to meet these trips for the 17 months between May 1997 and September 1998 is £1,795 compared to an average cost of £2,447 under the last year of the previous administration.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in her Department has other than for flights to and from Northern Ireland used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to her Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by her Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55560]

Marjorie Mowlam *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Agriculture

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps she is taking to alleviate the crisis in each sector of the agricultural industry in Northern Ireland. [59152]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In the past twelve months Grants and Subsidies payments worth over £200 million have been made to farmers in Northern Ireland. Included in these payments are the aid packages announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in December 1997 and February 1998.

In addition, the Prime Minister announced an additional £7 million for processing and marketing grants over the next three years to improve competitiveness in the agri-food industry and enable value to be added to what is produced on Northern Ireland farms.

Following the recent hard work by both Government and the industry to secure the lifting of the beef export ban, exports of beef from Northern Ireland have now commenced on a commercial scale. In recognition of the fact that it will take considerable effort to regain lost markets for Northern Ireland beef, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has put forward £2 million over the next three years to support the marketing work of the industry. Government are continuing to press for the introduction of a Date Based Export Scheme, which will bring benefit to more Northern Ireland farmers.

More favourable beef intervention arrangements have been secured for Northern Ireland and "flagged" suckler cow producers have received financial aid totalling £0.5 million.

Pig producers have been paid almost £0.5 million under the Pig Welfare Slaughter Scheme and export refunds for pigmeat were further increased on 15 October. DANI and the IDB are working with Unigate to enable them to take forward their re-investment plans in Northern Ireland with all reasonable speed.

Private Storage for sheepmeat will operate from 19 October to 20 November 1998 in the UK.

80 per cent. of beef special premium and suckler cow premium has been paid up front, rather than 60 per cent. as in previous years. £38 million in advance payments

have been made to Beef and Suckler Cow producers in the last 2 weeks. This is some 2 months earlier than has been achieved in recent years.

Around £6.3 million of Sheep Annual Premium (SAP) payments (2nd advance) were brought forward from December 1998 to October. Arrangements are in hand to expedite Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HLCA) payments in the Spring of 1999.

On top of this, Government also announced, on 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *624–40*, a special aid package for UK farmers amounting to some £125 million. This package is likely to be worth some £19 million to Northern Ireland farmers and will include payment of agrimonetary compensation, an increase in HLCAs and the temporary continuation of the Calf Processing Aid Scheme (CPAS).

Terrorist Offences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons in prison for terrorist offences she expects to remain in prison in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Great Britain, by 31 December 2000; and to which terrorist or paramilitary organisations those prisoners belong. [59083]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many murders were committed with firearms in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years and the current year; in how many cases in each year the fatal shots were fired with (1) a handgun, indicating how many such handguns were *(a)* revolvers and *(b)* automatic or semi-automatic weapons, (2) rifles of .22 calibre, (3) other rifles, indicating in respect of each of these two categories how many were *(a)* bolt action and *(b)* semi-automatic weapons, (4) machine guns and submachine guns, (5) shotguns, indicating how many such deaths were caused by legally held firearms of each category; and how many victims were killed by (i) the legal owner of the weapon used, (ii) terrorists, (iii) members of the armed forces, (iv) police officers and (v) other members of the security forces and prison officers. [59031]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

CR Tear Gas

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) in what circumstances the military and security forces in Northern Ireland have been authorised to use CR tear gas since 1968; [60283]

(2) how many times the security forces in Northern Ireland have used CR tear gas since 1968; on what dates CR gas was used; and for what reasons. [60286]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Police Interviews (Audio Recording)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *210*, relating to the audio recording of police interviews with terrorist suspects, if she will list the differences to which she refers. [60583]

Mr. Ingram: When the Draft Code of Practice under Section 53A of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 was being drawn up, no record was made of where the draft Code departed from the equivalent PACE Code.

To provide the information requested would require a check to be made of the draft Code against the NI PACE Code of Practice on the Tape Recording (Code E), which itself differs from the England and Wales PACE Code. The information is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost and outside the timescale allowed for reply. I have, however, arranged to have copies of the relevant codes relating to the EPA and NI PACE placed in the Library.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60375]

Mr. Paul Murphy: As of 18 November 1998, 8 vacancies have been identified and 2 New Deal jobseekers have been employed in the Northern Ireland Civil Service under the New Deal programme's Employment Option for 18–24 year olds. The identification of further vacancies suitable for New Deal jobseekers is ongoing and more appointments are expected to follow.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from her Department. [60521]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when sweaters were procured for the Royal Ulster Constabulary marked NI Police Service; and how many have been *(a)* ordered and *(b)* issued. [60362]

Mr. Ingram: No sweaters marked NI Police Service have been procured for issue to the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Water Cannon

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what circumstances the military and security forces in Northern Ireland have been authorised to use water cannon since 1968. [60288]

Mr. Ingram: Water cannons were withdrawn from service by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in December 1969 and have not been used since. Records are not available as to their usage prior to that time.

Integrated Education

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the Chairman and other members of the Government's Working Party on Integrated Education and the organisations they represent. [60463]

Mr. McFall: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Plastic and Rubber Bullets

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been killed as a result of the use of plastic or rubber bullets by the security forces in Northern Ireland since 1970. [60287]

Mr. Ingram: Records show that 16 deaths have resulted from the use of rubber and plastic baton rounds since 1970.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been injured as a result of the use of plastic or rubber bullets by the security forces in Northern Ireland since March 1981. [60284]

Mr. Ingram: Records indicate that 594 persons have been injured from the use of plastic baton rounds since March 1981.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Royal Ulster Constabulary *(a)* first and *(b)* last used rubber bullets; in which years since 1968 it used rubber bullets; and how many rubber bullets it used in each of those years. [60285]

Mr. Ingram: The first rubber baton rounds were fired by the Army in August 1970 with the last fired in November 1975. Plastic baton rounds were phased in from 1973. The RUC were first issued with baton guns in October 1978. The table shows the number of rounds fired since 1970.

Year	*Police*	*Army*	*Total*
1970	—	238	—
1971	—	16,752	—
1972	—	23,363	—
1973	—	12,766	—
1974	—	2,828	—
1975	—	3,701	—
1976	—	3,464	—
1977	—	1,490	—
1978	[1]—	1,743	—
1979	[1]—	1,271	—
1980	[1]—	1,231	—
1981	19,649	9,952	—
1982	335	154	—
1983	545	116	—
1984	1,503	265	—
1985	906	266	—
1986	1,462	325	—
1987	1,908	663	—
1988	2,292	817	—
1989	836	101	—
1990	211	46	—
1991	235	88	—
1992	39	49	—
1993	497	26	—
1994	214	35	—
1995	273	0	—
1996	6,949	1,387	—
1997	2,527	429	—
1998 (to 15 Nov)	820	62	—
Totals	41,201	83,628	124,829

[1] Police and Army

Notes:

1. There are no figures separating police and Army firings prior to 1981. Up to 1978 all baton rounds were fired by the Army. From October 1978 to March 1981 the figures shown include both police and Army.
2. The Army figures for 1997 and the RUC figures for 1998 may be subject to minor adjustment.
3. The figures for the years 1973, 1974 and 1975 include 42,216 and 3,556 plastic baton rounds respectively.
4. The dramatic increase in 1981 can be put down to the heavy rioting in support of the hunger strikers who died that year.

National Security Certificate Procedure

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations she has received from the Bar Council of Northern Ireland concerning the proposed role of members of the Bar appointed by the Attorney-General to represent parties excluded from hearings before tribunals under the National Security Certificate procedure; what replies she has sent; if she will make a statement; and if she will place the relevant correspondence in the Library. [60438]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Chairman of the Bar Council of Northern Ireland wrote to me on 5 November 1998 expressing a preliminary view on the proposed role of members of the Bar appointed by the Attorney-General to represent parties excluded from hearings before the proposed National Security Certificate Tribunal. The letter was copied to the Attorney-General. As the point raised related substantially to the operation of the Bar's Code of Conduct, the Attorney-General replied to the letter on 13 November. With my agreement, the letter was expressed to be a response on my behalf also.

I do not intend to make a statement but I will arrange to have copies of the two letters placed in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in the Cabinet Office has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to the Cabinet Office and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by the Cabinet Office (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55548]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those that applied under the previous Administration. The volume of travel by RAF

aircraft and private charter flights reflects our Presidency of the European Union, our chairmanship of the G8, and the leading role played by this Government in peace talks in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. This Question could be answered in the precise terms requested only at disproportionate cost. Between 2 May 1997 and 30 September 1998 I have used RAF aircraft/private charter aircraft on the following occasions:

Date	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Numbers accompanying minister*
May 1997	Northern Ireland	Official visit	6 8
	The Hague	Informal European Council	20 22
	Paris	NATO/Russia Summit	11 12
June 1997	Malmo—Bonn	Bilaterals in Bonn	20 17 18
	Paris	Talks and dinner with President Chirac	14 12
	Amsterdam	European Council	41 39
	Denver—New York	G7 Summit and UN General Assembly	58 63
	Hong Kong	Handover ceremony to China	21 23
July 1997	Madrid	NATO Summit	32 16
August 1997	Bologna	Bilateral with Italian PM/Holiday	12 2
	Pisa—Toulouse	Bilateral with French PM/Holiday	3 13 5
September 1997	Scotland	Regional tour/Balmoral	6 10
	Wrexham	Regional tour	10 11
October 1997	Moscow	Talks with President Yeltsin	31
	Luxembourg—Strasbourg	Dinner with Prime Minister Juncker Council of Europe Summit	12 11
	Belfast	Talks in Stormont and regional tour	9 11
	Edinburgh	CHOGM	16 18
November 1997	Luxembourg	EU Jobs Summit	17 14
	Bosnia	Visiting troops/Bosnian Leaders	21 22
December 1997	Luxembourg	European Council	28 36
	Belfast	Official visit	8 10
January 1998	Japan	EU/Japan Summit	50 51
	The Hague	Speech to the Ridderzaal	8 9
February 1998	Washington	Talks with Clinton	54 55
March 1998	Glasgow—Dundee—Teesside	Regional tour	11 10
	Bonn	Bilateral visit	7
	Paris	Address National Assembly and bilateral meetings	13
April 1998	Belfast	Northern Ireland Peace Agreement	8
	Belfast	Northern Ireland Peace Agreement	5 14
	Spain	Bilateral visit and holiday	6
	Cairo—Jeddah—Amman—Israel	Middle East Tour	46 48 47 51 53
	Manchester	Regional Tour	7 9

Date	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Numbers accompanying minister*
May 1998	Amsterdam—Brussels	Speech in The Hague and Special EMU Council in Brussels	11 12 16
	Belfast	Regional tour and talks	8 8
	Belfast	Talks	13 7
	Geneva Belfast	Speech to WTO Talks	10 8 9
June 1998	Madrid—Dublin—Belfast	Pre-European Council tour	11 11 6 6
	The Hague	Pre-European Council tour	7 10
	Rome—Vienna	Pre-European Council tour	9 10 9
	Stockholm—Helsinki—Copenhagen—Brussels—Luxembourg—Bonn—Paris	Pre-European Council tour	12 13 13 13
	Strasbourg	Speech to European Parliament	14 14
	Teesside Frankfurt	Regional tour Inauguration of European Central Bank	6 10 12
July 1998	Belfast	Talks	10 9
	Edinburgh Teesside	Regional tour Regional tour	11 16 4
August 1998	Bologna	Bilateral with Italian PM/Holiday	10 1
	Florence—Toulouse	Bilateral with French PM/Holiday	3 14 5
	Toulouse—Belfast—Toulouse	Talks in Northern Ireland	3 3
	Toulouse—London—Belfast	Talks in Northern Ireland	2 15 9 8
	Glasgow—Aberdeen	Regional tour	7 7
September 1998	Belfast	Talks	10 9
	Blackpool—Teesside—Newcastle—Lyneham	Regional tour	7 6 6
	Lyneham—Highgrove	Dinner at Highgrove	4

The average cost of the flights undertaken for these trips for the 17 months between May 1997 and September 1998 is £11,613 compared to £11,136 under the last year of the previous Administration. In addition to these flights, the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster used an RAF plane to make an official visit to Yeovilton in July 1997 accompanied by 3 officials. The cost was £1,109.

Euro

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *171*, what are the criteria for determining the appropriateness of the Euro Preparations Unit producing information packs for schools. [59857]

The Prime Minister: The purpose of the Government's communication campaign is to ensure UK businesses are aware of the implications of the introduction of the single currency from 1 January 1999.

A number of schools have requested copies of our fact-sheets, primarily for pupils on business studies and economics courses. No information packs have been specifically produced for schools.

The criterion for determining the focus of our information campaign is its effectiveness in raising business awareness of the advent of the euro next year. The focus and effectiveness of the campaign are things we keep under review.

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the revised Terms of Reference of the Senior Salaries Review Body; and if he will make a statement. [60184]

The Prime Minister: The Terms of Reference for the Senior Salaries Review Body have been revised as follows to reflect the key considerations of the Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper.

The Review Body on Senior Salaries provides independent advice to the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Defence on the remuneration of holders of judicial office; senior civil servants; senior officers of the armed forces; and other such public appointments as may from time to time be specified.

The Review Body also advises the Prime Minister from time to time on the pay and pensions of Members of Parliament and their allowances; on Peers' allowances; and on the pay, pensions and allowances of Ministers and others whose pay is determined by the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975.

In reaching its recommendations, the Review Body is to have regard to the following considerations:

the need to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified people to exercise their different responsibilities;

Government policies for improving the public services including the requirement on Departments to meet the output targets for the delivery of departmental services;

the funds available to departments as set out in the Government's departmental expenditure limits;

the Government's inflation target.

In making recommendations, the Review Body shall consider any factors that the Government and other witnesses may draw to its attention. In particular it shall have regard to:

differences in terms and conditions of employment between the public and private sector between the remit groups, taking account of relative job security and the value of benefits in kind;

changes in national pay systems, including flexibility and the reward of success; and job weight in differentiating the remuneration of particular posts; and

the need to maintain broad linkage between the remuneration of the three main remit groups, while allowing sufficient flexibility to take account of the circumstances of each group.

The Review Body may make other recommendations as it sees fit:

to ensure that, as appropriate, the remuneration of the remit groups relates coherently to that of their subordinates, encourages efficiency and effectiveness, and takes account of the different management and organisational structures that may be in place from time to time;

to relate reward to performance where appropriate;

to maintain the confidence of those covered by the Review Body's remit that it's recommendations have been properly and fairly determined; and

to ensure that the remuneration of those covered by the remit is consistent with the Government's equal opportunities policy.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the problems which have arisen in his Department from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60069]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* For the purpose of this answer, my office is part of the Cabinet Office.

The Cabinet Office and its agencies have well developed Year 2000 programmes in place and the necessary remedial work to correct non-compliant systems including those involving embedded chips is well advanced.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the contingency plans drawn up by his Department in relation to problems arising from millennium compliance, including the embedded chip problem, after 31 December 1999. [60071]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* For the purpose of this answer, my office is part of the Cabinet Office.

The Cabinet Office and its agencies business continuity plans are being reviewed to ensure that they deal with any risks posed by the millennium bug.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what is his latest estimate of the total cost of tackling the millennium computer problem including the embedded chip problem in his Department, separately identifying expenditure to date and future expenditure; and if he will make a statement; [60068]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the computer systems in his Department will be modified and tested in relation to the millennium computer problem by January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [60070]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* For the purpose of this answer, my office is part of the Cabinet Office.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1109*, in which she announced the results of the latest quarterly review of Government department and agencies progress in tackling the bug. This also covered key organisations within the wider public sector. The information the hon. Member requests will be found in the copies of departments' plans which have been published in the Libraries of the House. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and the updates to quarterly plans will be published in the Libraries of the House and on the internet.

Advisory Committee on Business Appointments

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he proposes to take following the recent report of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments. [60836]

The Prime Minister: I am today placing in the Libraries of both Houses revised "Guidelines on the Acceptance of Appointments or Employment outside

Governments by Former Ministers of the Crown". They will replace the existing Guidelines, which the Committee said could be improved, from the start of the next Session of Parliament.

The changes are designed to make clearer the role of the Committee and the circumstances in which former Ministers should consult them, and do not alter the system itself which the Committee reported was otherwise working well.

Pörtschach

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will deposit in the Library a copy of the speech he delivered at Pörtschach; and what (i) minutes and (ii) notes were taken by *(a)* United Kingdom delegates and *(b)* the Council Secretariat. [60779]

The Prime Minister: This meeting of the Heads of Government was an informal meeting in preparation for the full European Council in Vienna, at which a broad range of issues were discussed. No formal decisions were taken.

I did not make a formal speech. As this was an informal meeting there were neither formal minutes nor conclusions. As has been the practice under previous administrations, a member of the UK delegation took an informal record of the discussion, but as is standard practice, this remains confidential. There is no formal Council Secretariat record.

Chile

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has held with the Prime Minister of Spain concerning relations with *(a)* Chile and *(b)* the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [60468]

The Prime Minister: I hold regular discussions with Mr. Aznar on EU and other international issues both bilaterally and at meetings of EU Heads of State and Government. Mr. Aznar and I met most recently in London on 2 November and have had a number of telephone conversations since then.

Iraq

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with his Ministers prior to his decison to authorise armed action against Iraq on 14 November; and when. [60651]

The Prime Minister: It is the normal convention under this and previous Governments that discussions which take place between the Prime Minister and Ministers are not routinely disclosed.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 610, what support there is in *(a)* the Arab world, *(b)* Iran, *(c)* the Islamic world and *(d)* Asia for sustained bombing of Iraq if Saddam Hussein again obstructs the work of the UNSCOM inspectors. [60730]

The Prime Minister: The UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1205, condemning Iraq's decision to cease co-operation with UNSCOM as a flagrant violation of UN resolutions. The Damascus Declaration states (Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and UAE) announced that Iraq would be responsible for any consequences if it did not reverse its decision. The international community has lost patience with Iraqi intransigence and non-co-operation.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of whether Baghdad received warning of an imminent attack, and from what source. [60732]

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my statement on 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 607–10, a private warning from the UK was delivered directly to the Iraqi Permanent Representative at the UN on 12 November. When the Iraqi government climbed down, they had clearly assessed that this and other warnings were serious and that military action was imminent.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the collateral damage to civilian Iraqi people which would result from a military air strike against Iraq. [60742]

The Prime Minister: The risk of collateral damage is a major consideration in selecting targets and only precision guided weaponry would be used. Military action can never be risk-free, but the combination of precision weaponry and careful planning offers by far the best chance of minimising such dangers.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 610, what the basis was for his statement about Iraqi propaganda being repeated in Britain. [60733]

The Prime Minister: I was commenting on the tendency of some sections of the British media to report Iraqi Government information as fact.

Iraq claims that the suffering of its people is due to sanctions. But the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights concluded in his October interim report that the Government of Iraq bear the primary responsibility for their continuing suffering. Reasons for this include Iraq's decision to prohibit shipments of humanitarian aid from third countries and its decision to stop supplying its food ration to the Iraqi people. Iraq complains that its people are starving, but it is selling wheat and barley to Jordan and Syria at low prices.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 610, what consultation he has had with international lawyers about attacking Iraq without further warning; [60731]

(2) pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 611, what consultation he has had with international lawyers about removing a head of state. [60735]

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 609, for what reasons there is to be no negotiation with Iraq. [60729]

The Prime Minister: Iraq's obligations under the relevant UN Security Council resolutions are clear. There is no need for negotiations.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 608, what representations he has received from *(a)* Iran, *(b)* Jordan, *(c)* Saudi Arabia, *(d)* Syria, *(e)* other Arab states and *(f)* Israel about the risks to them from Iraq's behaviour. [60728]

The Prime Minister: The risks posed by Iraq's behaviour are well-documented: Iraq fired nearly 200 Scud missiles against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war; during the Gulf War it fired Scud missiles indiscriminately against Saudi and Israeli cities.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the UNSCOM officials paid 180,000 US dollars a year or more. [60740]

The Prime Minister: We do not keep this information. This is a matter for UNSCOM.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 614, what assessment he has made of the threat from pollution to Arab neighbours if missiles are unleashed against targets in Iraq. [60739]

The Prime Minister: In selecting targets for military action, all relevant factors are taken into account.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 608, if he will list the materials found at presidential sites by UNSCOM. [60727]

The Prime Minister: As I told my hon. Friend on 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 372, a full report on the UNSCOM/IAEA Presidential site inspections was submitted to United Nations Security Council members on 15 April. The report recorded that the sites had very obviously been extensively cleared before the inspectors entered.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the recent statement by Mr. Denis Halliday concerning oil for food arrangements in Iraq. [60734]

The Prime Minister: We regret Mr. Halliday's criticisms of "oil for food" at a time when the UN's latest report shows that the programme is bringing greater benefits to the Iraqi people. But we agree with him that it is unfortunate the UN has been obliged to sustain the sanctions regime against Iraq for so long. This is entirely the fault of Iraq.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 617, to which words of the UN Secretary-General he was referring. [60741]

The Prime Minister: I was referring to the UN Secretary General's statement to the press on 15 November, saying that Iraq's agreement to resume full co-operation

"is a victory for all those who expressed their firm determination that UN resolutions must be respected".

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 613, what evidence underlay his statement that money for the food programme has gone to elite people around Saddam Hussein; and whom he includes as members of that group. [60738]

The Prime Minister: The Iraqi regime does not have direct access to "oil for food" funds. But as soon as "oil for food" started the Iraqi government reduced their own spending on essential humanitarian goods for the Iraqi people and diverted these funds to other purposes.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 613–14, what is the nature of the support expressed by Arab states, and what measures they supported. [60737]

The Prime Minister: After their 11–12 November meeting in Doha, the Foreign Ministers of the Damascus Declaration states (Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and UAE) called on Iraq to rescind its decision to halt co-operation with UNSCOM and to implement all relevant Security Council resolutions. The Ministers held Iraq responsible for any consequences resulting from Iraq's refusal to rescind that decision.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the reasons for establishing an Iraq media unit within Her Majesty's Government. [60811]

The Prime Minister: The Government have set up an ad hoc inter-departmental group chaired by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). The group ensures that the Government's media response to the Iraq crisis is properly co-ordinated.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 612, concerning the views of the international community, what evidence he has obtained that *(a)* the UN Secretary General, *(b)* Iran, *(c)* the Arab world, *(d)* Russia, *(e)* China and *(f)* France accept that next time Iraq obstructs the work of UN inspectors there will be no formal negotiation regardless of last minute pleas and letters. [60736]

The Prime Minister: On 15 November the UN Secretary-General stated that, if there were a next time, he was not sure that there would be time for further diplomatic initiatives and appeals. France has acknowledged the role of the threat of force in resolving this crisis. The Security Council as a whole has called on Iraq to demonstrate unconditional and sustained co-operation with UN inspectors and the Damascus Declaration states (Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and UAE) held Iraq responsible for any consequences resulting from a refusal to resume co-operation with UNSCOM.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Prime Minister if the Iraqi Government signified to the Secretary-General of the United Nations their willingness to co-operate with the UNSCOM inspectors after the orders had been given by the Prime Minister to launch an attack; how long before the attack on targets in Iraq was due to commence, the communication from the Iraqi Government were received by the United Nations; and what was the source from which the Iraqi Government learned that an attack was imminent. [60668]

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my statement on 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 607–10, a private warning from the UK was delivered directly to the Iraqi Permanent Representative at the UN on 12 November.

On the morning of 14 November I gave final authorisation for the use of force against Iraq that afternoon. Just over two hours before the attack was due to commence, we learned that the UN Secretary-General had received a message from the Iraqis. The Iraqis can have been in no doubt about our resolve to take action.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Prime Minister which countries were aware that orders had been given to initiate an attack on targets in Iraq. [60746]

The Prime Minister: We have been in close contact with many countries throughout this crisis. As has been the practice under this and previous administrations, it is not Government policy to disclose the content of these conversations.

World Wars (Civilian Women)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to commemorate the contribution of those civilian women who worked directly to support the war effort in both world wars. [60660]

The Prime Minister: The contribution of all who gave their lives and suffered in the service of their country, including those women who played a vital role in industry, agriculture and other civilian services in both world wars, is recognised at the ceremony at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday.

I understand from the Royal British Legion, who are responsible for organising the march past the Cenotaph which follows the official ceremony on Remembrance Sunday, that they intend to make proposals which will allow greater participation in future years by non ex-Service groups and individuals.

Security Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister how many hon. Members have been identified by the security services as a security risk. [60433]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *402*.

It is not appropriate to comment in detail on security matters. However, in its recent annual report the Intelligence and Security Committee referred to the process and gave an indication of the numbers of honourable Members involved.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal

14. **Ms Blears:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provision can be made to enable young people participating in the new deal to acquire basic skills to enhance their prospects of employment. [59116]

Mr. Andrew Smith: One of the key roles for New Deal Personal Advisers is to identify young people with basic skills needs. A range of help is available which is in place, including assessment, advice and access to training in basic literacy, numeracy and IT.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60367]

Mr. Mudie: As at 18 November, the information on Civil Service Departments (including their Agencies) participating or intending to participate as employers in the New Deal is as follows:

Main department name (including their agencies	*New Deal staff employed*	*Additional posts allocated but not yet filled*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1	3
Cabinet Office	4	4
Culture, Media and Sport	0	3
Education and Employment	131	'16
Environment, Transport and the Regions	0	11
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	0	8
Health	2	'0
Home Office	0	15
International Development	0	'0
Lord Chancellor's	0	6
Ministry of Defence	5	16
Northern Ireland Office	2	8
Scottish Office	7	43
Social Security	0	'0
Trade and Industry	18	14
HM Treasury	3	6
Welsh Office	4	16
Total	177	169

[1] These departments (including their Agencies) are allocating posts to be taken up within the next few months

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of the tender document which was sent to those wishing to participate in the forthcoming New Deal pilot schemes for those aged 25 years or over. [60853]

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many New Deal clients in Hendon have *(a)* had interviews with personal advisers, *(b)* proceeded through the Gateway, *(c)* had interviews with prospective employers and *(d)* obtained employment; and if he will make a statement. [60421]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I will write to the hon. Member and my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60529]

Mr. Mudie: NDPBs are encouraged to participate as an employer in New Deal. Information on the numbers of people taken under the New Deal by Non-Departmental bodies is not held centrally.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many new courses or new places on existing courses have been provided for 18 to 24 year olds undertaking education and training under the New Deal *(a)* nationally, *(b)* by delivery unit and *(c)* by New Deal option. [59200]

Mr. Andrew Smith: To the end of August, there have been 5,600 starts on the Full Time Education and Training option. Figures for individual units of delivery are available in the Library.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the responsibilities of each agency in relation to the health and safety of New Deal clients who have taken the option of a subsidised job. [60400]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The New Deal Employment Option aims to encourage employers to take on long-term unemployed people by the payment of a subsidy. Once recruited, the status of people who take subsidised jobs is identical to that of any other employee. Their health and safety is the responsibility of the employer, and is handled in accordance with the employer's established procedure for meeting the requirements of health and safety legislation.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made in securing employer involvement in the New Deal for the young unemployed. [59113]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon, South (Ms Drown) on 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 1093.

Special Needs

15. **Angela Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received regarding provision for children with special educational needs in Essex. [59117]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Over the past year, my Department has received some 250 letters from members of the public, the Essex Local Education Authority, hon. Members and others about provision for children with special educational needs in Essex. These include responses to the Green Paper "Excellence for all children".

21. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to support children with special educational needs. [59124]

Mr, Charles Clarke: Our plans for supporting children with special educational needs (SEN) are set out in

Meeting Special Educational Needs: A programme of action, published on 5 November. They include:

better support and advice for parents and carers of children with SEN;

improving the SEN framework, but retaining parents' rights to seek a statutory assessment and statement of SEN;

developing a more inclusive education system;

developing the knowledge and skills of all staff working with children with SEN; and

promoting partnership in SEN locally, regionally and nationally.

Implementation of the Action Programme will be supported by funding of almost £60 million in 1999–2000.

24. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his policy towards integrating children with special educational needs into mainstream schools. [59128]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Action Programme—"Meeting Special Educational Needs"—published on 5 November, sets out steps to promote further inclusion of children with special educational needs where parents want it and appropriate support can be provided. We are providing financial support of up to £8 million in 1999–2000 through the SEN Standards Fund to promote inclusion, and increasing the capital support under the Schools Access Initiative from the £4 million we inherited to £20 million.

30. **Dr. Desmond Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his proposal to enhance the early detection and support provision for children with learning difficulties. [59134]

Mr. Charles Clarke: On 5 November 1998 we published *Meeting Special Educational Needs: A programme for action*. This explains how through our early years policies such as the new Sure Start programme, the Early Years Development and Child Care Planning process, our Early Excellence Centres, the introduction of baseline assessment and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies we will encourage earlier identification of difficulties and appropriate early intervention. It also sets out the practical steps we will take to support children with special educational needs, including those with learning difficulties.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the £56 million for funding of an early intervention programme includes funding for a specific training module for special educational needs for new teachers at teacher training college. [56900]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There are no specific modules for special educational needs which trainees must take as part of their initial training. However since May this year, in order successfully to complete a course of initial training, all trainee teachers must have demonstrated that they can identify pupils who have special educational needs and know where to get help in order to give positive and targeted support.

Universities (Selection Procedures)

17. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the fairness of the present methods used by universities to select students. [59119]

Mr. Mudie: The selection of students is a matter for individual universities, but the Department, UCAS and other agencies monitor and analyse the overall profile of student entry. We encourage all universities and colleges to be flexible and imaginative in assessing the potential of applicants, so that selection is fair to applicants from all backgrounds.

Further Education

18. **Mr. Ilsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the future of off-site collaborative provision in further education colleges. [59121]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considers that cost-effective and high quality collaborative provision can make a significant contribution to the lifelong learning agenda. But some aspects of collaborative provision have caused concern. We shall keep those under review with the Further Education Funding Council.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to improve standards of achievement in further and higher education. [59120]

Mr. Mudie: The Government's commitment to raising standards throughout Further and Higher Education is being taken forward through active collaboration with the funding councils and other partners. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce details shortly, building on our plans announced in *The Learning Age*.

Under-fives

19. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his plans for provision for the under-fives. [59122]

Ms Hodge: A free, high quality, early education place is available across England for four year olds; and two thirds of three year-olds will have places by 2002. Early Years Development and Childcare Plans will show how this is to be integrated locally with daycare.

Computer Technology

20. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement about the use of computer technology in schools. [59123]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government view the use of new technologies as an integral part of their education and lifelong learning policies aimed at raising standards in schools, modernising Britain and equipping us to compete in the global economy of the Information Age. These plans are being backed with an investment of over £1bn over the next four years. A full statement of the Government's plans for the use of new technologies in

schools and other learning institutions can be found in Open for Learning, Open for Business, a copy of which is lodged in the House of Commons Library.

Primary Teachers (Training)

22. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures his Department is taking to improve the training of primary school teachers. [59125]

32. **Miss Melanie Johnson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures his Department is taking to improve the training of primary school teachers. [59136]

Mr. Charles Clarke: From September this year all those training to become primary school teachers must follow a national training curriculum in English and mathematics which specifies the essential core of knowledge, understanding and skills which all trainees must be taught, know and be able to do in relation to primary English and mathematics.

As part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, all serving primary teachers will receive training in the most effective methods of teaching these key skills.

Maintained Schools

25. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the role of the private sector in the management of schools. [59129]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Responsibility for managing maintained schools which have delegated budgets rests in law with the governing body, with support as necessary from the local education authority. Governing bodies and local authorities may purchase advice or services from the private sector to help them meet their statutory duties.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *524*, on the cost of qualifications in maintained schools, if he will rank each local education authority in order of the cost per *(a)* A level and *(b)* GCSE, by dividing the education standard spending assessment per secondary school pupil by the number of qualifications obtained in each authority. [60094]

Mr. Mudie: *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

26. **Mr. Townend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of persons granted asylum who have obtained employment in each of the last three years. [59130]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No such estimate has been made.

Young Unemployed (Remedial Training)

27. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to improve literacy and numeracy skills among the young unemployed. [59131]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In the New Deal for 18–24 year olds young people who lack the basic skills they need to enter employment will be given help to gain those skills, and to pursue an appropriate qualification. Depending on their level of need, help can be in the form of short, intensive courses, while they are on the Gateway, full-time study through the Full-Time Education and Training option, or, for those on one of the three work-based options, study towards a qualification one day per week, or the equivalent.

Sixteen and 17 year olds in Work-based Training for Young People may also receive help to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, where this will help them to achieve their vocational objective.

Teachers (Recruitment and Retention)

28. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he proposes to increase recruitment and retention of teachers *(a)* in London and *(b)* elsewhere. [59132]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We will publish before the end of the year a Green Paper on the teaching profession which will propose a range of reforms to improve the attractiveness of teaching as a career. In addition to this, my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards announced last month a £130 million package of measures designed to boost teacher recruitment in the short term. This includes the establishment of a network of local recruitment advisers in areas with high teacher vacancies. Eleven London boroughs—including Southwark—already know they will benefit from these additional resources. These measures will add to the strong programme of action already being taken forward by the Teacher Training Agency. This includes a number of activities focused specifically on London including next month's Teaching in London Event.

Family-friendly Employment

29. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to promote family-friendly employment practices. [59133]

Ms Hodge: Our detailed plans were set out in the recently published Home Office consultation document "Supporting Families". Over the coming months, building on the legislative agenda set out in the "Fairness at Work" White Paper and working in partnership with other Governmental Departments, employers and other key players, we will be taking forward an awareness and promotional campaign to promote the benefits of family friendly working practices.

Learning Direct Helpline

31. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the learning direct advice and information line. [59135]

Mr. Mudie: Learning Direct has been a resounding success. Since its launch in February it has given over 370,000 callers free high quality impartial information

and advice on learning opportunities. The freephone number (0800 100 900) has been trailed on all five terrestrial television channels.

Learning Direct has a key role in the Government's commitment to creating a learning society. Because of its success, we recently announced an increase in its budget to £6.25 million for the 1999–2000 financial year. This will enable us to develop and expand the service to prepare for the extra demand for learning advice and information created by the University for Industry, scheduled to be launched in the year 2000.

Primary Schools (Standards)

33. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures he is taking to improve standards of numeracy and literacy in primary schools. [59137]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are providing significant investment to support the implementation of both the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in primary schools. We have allocated almost £60 million to the literacy strategy in 1998–99, and committed a further £120 million per annum over the next three years to both strategies. This will support a comprehensive professional development and training programme for teachers designed to raise literacy and numeracy standards in schools.

Postgraduate Student Loans

34. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the uptake of career development loans by postgraduate students in Great Britain. [59138]

Mr. Mudie: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Training and Enterprise Councils

35. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to improve the performance of training and enterprise councils. [59139]

Mr. Mudie: We are currently considering the results of a consultation on the future role of Training and Enterprise Councils which ended on 30 September. The consultation paper "TECs: Meeting the Challenge of the Millennium" covered a range of proposals designed to improve the performance of TECs. Copies of this document are available in the Library. We will be announcing the outcome in the coming months.

Local Management of Schools

36. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to encourage local initiatives in school governance and management. [59140]

Ms Estelle Morris: Education Action Zones provide considerable scope for innovation in school governance and management. My Department is also sponsoring demonstration projects to show how schools can set up streamlined administrative systems. In addition, we are keen to build on the many excellent initiatives being developed around the country through identifying and spreading good practice. With this in mind, we plan to issue good practice guidance on governor training next year.

Adult and Community Learning Fund

37. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the adult and community learning fund. [59141]

Mr. Mudie: The Adult and Community Learning Fund prospectus was published on 28 August 1998. We received nearly 400 applications in the first round of bidding which closed on 5 October. Following consideration by the Department's independent Advisory Panel we announced funding in principle for 65 projects covering a wide range of local activities to involve more people in learning relevant to their lives. The closing date for the second round of applications, including re-submissions of first round bids referred back for further development, is 30 November 1998.

Pre-school Playgroups

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what role he plans for pre-school playgroups and nurseries in the national childcare strategy; and how he will support that role. [59127]

Ms Hodge: The Green Paper "Meeting the Childcare Challenge" which was published in May, sets out the Government's plans for a National Childcare Strategy to raise their quality of care, to make childcare more affordable and to make it more accessible.

The private and voluntary sector has an important role to play in delivering the objectives of the National Childcare Strategy and in meeting our commitment of a free nursery place for every four year old.

Women (Employment)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the percentage of women with a child aged between 10 and 15 years who *(a)* work full-time, *(b)* work part-time *(c)* are unemployed and *(d)* are economically inactive. [60769]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Edward Leigh, dated 19 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary questions (60765, 60766, 60767, 60768, 60769 and 60770) about the economic status of mothers with dependent children.

Tables attached show data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which is the ONS major source of labour market data on individuals.

The first table shows the latest available quarterly data for the United Kingdom. The second table gives the same analysis for Great Britain for the average of the period from spring 1996 to winter 1996/7 i.e. on a geography and time period consistent with the answers to your other three questions about demographic data.

In the General Household Survey (GHS), adults and children in each household are assigned to families: married couple families; cohabiting couple families and lone parent families. Children belong to the appropriate family either by virtue of being the natural children of both the parents forming the couple, or of the lone parent, or else, if they are adoptive or stepchildren, by belonging to the same family as their adoptive/step parents. Foster children, however are not regarded part of their foster parent family since they are not related to them. For the purpose of answering this question, it has been assumed that the natural/adoptive/step parent(s) are the adults responsible for the children. Attached are tables from the GHS give the information requested regarding households.

Economic status of mothers by age of youngest dependent child

Percentage

	Age of youngest dependent child		
	0 to 4	*5 to 9*	*10 to 15*
UK, summer 1998, not seasonally adjusted			
In employment:	50.2	66.0	73.9
Of which full-time	18.0	23.8	34.0
Of which part-time	32.2	42.2	39.8
ILO Unemployed	4.5	4.7	3.3
Inactive	45.3	29.3	22.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
GB, average spring 1996 to winter 1996/7			
In employment:	49.4	64.7	74.0
Of which full-time	16.7	21.5	33.2
of which part-time	32.7	43.1	40.7
ILO Unemployed	4.8	5.4	3.6
Inactive	45.9	29.9	22.4
Active	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Percentage of dependent children living in families within private households according to the de facto marital status of the head of family, 1996, Great Britain

De facto status of head of family	*Percentage*
Married couple	70
Cohabiting	7
Single (never married)	8
Widowed	1
Divorced	8
Separated	7

Source:
General Household Survey, ONS

Percentage of families with dependent children by marital status of head of family, 1996, Great Britain

Type of family with dependent children	*Percentage*
Married couple	70
Cohabiting couple	8
Lone mother	20
Lone father	2
Total	100

Source:
General Household Survey, ONS

Household heads by de facto marital status, 1996, Great Britain

Household head	*Percentage*
Married	54
Cohabiting	6
Single (never married)	13
Widowed	15
Divorced	8
Separated	3
Total	100

Source:
General Household Survey, ONS

Teacher Training

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many initial teacher training places funded by his Department have not been filled by the Teacher Training Agency in each subject for the current year. [59198]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following table shows the target and actual intake to initial teacher training for the year 1998–99. We continuously monitor recruitment to initial teacher training in order to be responsive to supply and demand. A £130 million package of short-term measures designed to boost teacher recruitment, particularly in the key subject areas of mathematics and science, was announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards on 27 October. Details of this have been placed in the Library.

Target and actual recruitment[1] to initial teacher training[2] courses in England, 1998–99

	Target	*Actual*	*Difference (actual-target)*
Primary[3]	11,500	11,545	45
Mathematics	2,150	1,120	–1,030
English[4]	2,200	1,970	–230
Science	3,050	2,286	–764
Modern foreign languages	2,300	1,657	–643
Technology[5]	3,000	1,682	–1,318
History	900	898	–2
Geography	1,000	747	–253
Physical education	1,450	1,491	41
Art	1,100	904	–196
Music	600	493	–107
Religious education	750	606	–144
Other[6]	600	523	–77
Total secondary	19,100	14,377	–4,723

[1] Provisional

[2] Includes School Centred ITT (SCITT)

[3] The primary target includes the 294 places that the TTA allocated to the Open University for a part-time PGCE course commencing in February 1999. These places were relinquished by the OU, subsequently reallocated to providers offering new part-time courses starting in April 1999, and so will not have yet been filled.

[4] The English target given here differs slightly to the one announced by the DfEE in 1997. This is because the target the TTA allocated to 'drama' is currently included in other.

[5] Technology includes Design and Technology, Information Technology, Business Studies and Home Economics.

[6] Other includes Classics, Economics, Other social sciences, Other subjects and, currently, drama. Therefore, the target for 'other' differs slightly to the one announced at the end of 1997 because of the inclusion of drama.

Source:
Recruitment
TTA Survey of ITT Providers 1998–99
Target
DfEE.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the initial teacher training course providers that have *(a)* added courses and *(b)* increased the number of places on offer on existing courses in each subject; and if he will list for each of *(a)* and *(b)* the number of places added for the funding years 1997–98 and 1998–99. [59199]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Teacher Training Agency's allocations of additional initial teacher training places for individual providers in 1997–98 and 1998–99 are set out in the table; those for new courses are asterisked. The 1997 allocation also awarded some places in 1998–99 and these have been included in the 1998–99 column.

Additional places on initial teacher training courses 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98 prim	1998–99 prim	1997–98 math	1998–99 math	1997–98 Eng	1998–99 Eng	1997–98 sci	1998–99 sci	1997–98 lang	1998–99 lang
Anglia Polytechnic University	—	—	—	—	—	8	—	—	—	—
Bath College of HE	—	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Billericay Education Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bishop Grosseteste College	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Borough of Pool SCITT	—	*24	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford & Ilkey Community College	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	—	*15	—
Bretton Hall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bromley Schools Collegiate	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Brunel University	—	—	—	—	5	6	—	—	5	—
Chiltern Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Canterbury Christ Church College	7	50	—	—	3	5	—	—	20	—
Central School of Speech & Drama	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Centre for British Teachers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE	—	16	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	3
Chester College of HE	—	—	—	5	—	6	—	—	*10	3
Chichester Institute of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chiltern Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coastal Confederation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
College of Ripon & York St. John	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
College of St. Mark & St. John	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
Corby & District Maths Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria Primary Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
De Montfort University	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	5
East Midland Initial Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edge Hill College of HE	—	—	—	—	—	60	—	8	31	—
Gloucestershire ITE Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Goldsmiths College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grand Union Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	—	*6	—	—	—
Homerton College, Cambridge	—	—	—	—	10	25	20	—	20	—
Institute of Education	4	30	—	—	5	—	—	—	—	—
Keele University	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—
Kent Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	*4	—	*6	—	*12
King Alfred's College, Winchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	*13	—	—	—
King's College London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	15	—
La Sainte Union College of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancaster University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Marches Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*5
Mid Essex Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds Metropolitan University	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—
Lindisfarne SCITT	—	*26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Liverpool Hope College	3	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	25	—
Liverpool John Moores University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Loughborough University of Technology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Manchester Metropolitan University	5	59	—	—	—	25	—	—	—	—
Marches Consortium	—	—	—	*3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maryvale Institute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid-Essex Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesex University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*18	2
Nene College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newman Catholic Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	*20
Newman College	—	—	—	—	—	20	—	—	—	—
North Bedfordshire Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Riding College	—	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West Kent Teacher Trainers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottingham Trent University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Open University	—	—	—	—	—	30	—	—	—	—
Oxford Brookes University	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Roehampton Institute	14	34	—	—	11	—	—	—	3	4
St. Martin's College	—	110	—	—	—	31	—	—	25	—
Sheffield Hallam University	5	37	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull Secondary Group	—	—	*10	—	10	—	*10	—	*10	—
Somerset SCITT Consortium	—	*22	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Bank University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South West Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Additional places on initial teacher training courses 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98 prim	1998–99 prim	1997–98 math	1998–99 math	1997–98 Eng	1998–99 Eng	1997–98 sci	1998–99 sci	1997–98 lang	1998–99 lang
St. Mary's College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Thomas High School SCITT	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*10	—
Staffordshire University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Douay Martyrs Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The North London Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Oxfordshire Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Shire Foundation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thomas Telford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Titan Partnership	—	—	*5	—	*8	—	*8	—	—	—
Trinity & All Saints College	3	—	—	—	—	8	—	—	—	—
University of Bath	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
University of Birmingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Brighton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9
University of Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Cambridge	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Central England	1	2	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—
University of Derby	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Durham	—	24	—	—	—	20	—	—	—	30
University of East Anglia	2	17	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	4
University of East London	1	25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Exeter	—	—	—	10	—	—	—	18	—	3
University of Greenwich	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Hertfordshire	4	22	—	—	—	5	—	—	2	—
University of Huddersfield	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Hull	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent Training Group	—	—	—	*4	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Leeds	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	12	—	2
University of Leicester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Liverpool	—	—	—	—	—	7	—	—	—	—
University of Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	15	—
University of North London	—	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	3	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	—
University of Nottingham	—	—	—	10	—	—	—	10	4	11
University of Oxford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Plymouth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Portsmouth	—	—	5	—	—	5	—	—	—	—
University of Reading	—	—	—	—	—	6	—	—	15	—
University of Sheffield	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Southampton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	—
University of Sunderland	—	9	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
University of Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Warwick	—	—	—	—	19	16	—	—	6	—
University of West of England	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—
University of Wolverhampton	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	2	—	5
University of York	—	—	2	—	—	—	2	—	2	—
Urban Learning Foundation	—	—	—	—	*5	—	—	—	*8	—
Wandsworth Primary Schools' Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Westhill College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Westminster College, Oxford	—	—	10	—	3	—	—	—	15	20

Additional places on initial teacher training courses 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98 D&T	1998–99 D&T	1997–98 IT 97	1998–99 IT 98	1997–98 other tech	1998–99 other tech	1997–98 hist	1998–99 hist	1997–98 geog	1998–99 geog
Anglia Polytechnic University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bath College of HE	26	—	*15	—	—	—	—	—	5	—
Billericay Education Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bishop Grosseteste College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Borough of Pool SCITT	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford & Ilkey Community College	—	*10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bretton Hall	—	—	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bromley Schools Collegiate	—	—	*2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Brunel University	15	—	*16	—	—	—	—	—	6	—
Chiltern Training Group	—	—	*6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Canterbury Christ Church College	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	10	8	5
Central School of Speech & Drama	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Centre for British Teachers	*2	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chester College of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chichester Institute of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Additional places on initial teacher training courses 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98 D&T	1998–99 D&T	1997–98 IT 97	1998–99 IT 98	1997–98 other tech	1998–99 other tech	1997–98 hist	1998–99 hist	1997–98 geog	1998–99 geog
Chiltern Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coastal Confederation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
College of Ripon & York St. John	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
College of St. Mark & St. John	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Corby & District Maths Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria Primary Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
De Montfort University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Midland Initial Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edge Hill College of HE	22	26	5	25	22	—	3	—	8	7
Gloucestershire ITE Partnership	—	—	*8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Goldsmiths College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grand Union Partnership	—	—	*2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Homerton College, Cambridge	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Institute of Education	—	—	*20	10	—	—	—	2	8	—
Keele University	—	—	7	—	—	—	5	—	—	—
Kent Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
King Alfred's College, Winchester	2	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
King's College London	—	—	5	17	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
La Sainte Union College of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancaster University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Marches Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid Essex Consortium	—	—	—	*5	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds Metropolitan University	22	—	*33	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lindisfarne SCITT	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Liverpool Hope College	—	—	*20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Liverpool John Moores University	25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Loughborough University of Technology	—	—	*16	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Manchester Metropolitan University	—	*15	—	—	40	—	—	—	8	4
Marches Consortium	—	*7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maryvale Institute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid-Essex Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesex University	6	—	—	*15	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nene College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newman Catholic Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newman College	—	—	*25	11	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Bedfordshire Consortium	—	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Riding College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West Kent Teacher Trainers	—	—	—	—	*8	—	—	—	—	—
Nottingham Trent University	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Open University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oxford Brookes University	—	—	*14	—	—	—	—	—	5	—
Roehampton Institute	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Martin's College	—	—	34	15	—	—	6	—	—	18
Sheffield Hallam University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull Secondary Group	—	—	—	—	*6	—	*8	—	—	—
Somerset SCITT Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Bank University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South West Teacher Training	—	—	—	*5	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Mary's College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Thomas High School SCITT	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Douay Martyrs Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The North London Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Oxfordshire Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Shire Foundation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thomas Telford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Titan Partnership	*3	—	—	*6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trinity & All Saints College	—	6	1	3	2	9	4	—	—	—
University of Bath	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
University of Birmingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2	8
University of Brighton	12	10	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—	—
University of Cambridge	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
University of Central England	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Derby	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	—	4	4
University of East Anglia	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	7	10
University of East London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Exeter	4	10	—	—	—	—	9	—	5	21
University of Greenwich	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Huddersfield	21	—	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Hull	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	1	—

Additional places on initial teacher training courses 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98 D&T	1998–99 D&T	1997–98 IT 97	1998–99 IT 98	1997–98 other tech	1998–99 other tech	1997–98 hist	1998–99 hist	1997–98 geog	1998–99 geog
Kent Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Leeds	—	14	6	4	—	—	—	—	8	—
University of Leicester	—	—	*10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Liverpool	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Manchester	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of North London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	41	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Nottingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	2	4	7
University of Oxford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Plymouth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Portsmouth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Reading	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Sheffield	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Southampton	—	—	*15	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Sunderland	—	5	25	10	20	—	—	—	—	—
University of Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Warwick	—	—	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of West of England	15	—	—	—	7	—	—	—	—	5
University of Wolverhampton	—	4	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—
University of York	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Urban Learning Foundation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*4	—
Wandsworth Primary Schools' Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Westhill College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands Consortium	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Westminster College, Oxford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Additional places on initial teacher training courses 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98 PE	1998–99 PE	1997–98 art	1998–99 art	1997–98 music	1998–99 music	1997–98 RE	1998–99 RE	1997–98 other	1998–99 other
Anglia Polytechnic University	—	—	6	32	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bath College of HE	—	—	—	—	—	22	2	—	—	—
Billericay Education Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bishop Grosseteste College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Borough of Pool SCITT	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford & Ilkey Community College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bretton Hall	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	6
Bromley Schools Collegiate	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Brunel University	18	—	—	—	—	—	2	7	—	—
Chiltern Training Group	—	—	—	*6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Canterbury Christ Church College	10	—	—	—	—	6	—	—	—	*15
Central School of Speech & Drama	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Centre for British Teachers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*2
Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	8	—	—
Chester College of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—
Chichester Institute of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chiltern Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coastal Confederation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
College of Ripon & York St. John	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
College of St. Mark & St. John	—	—	*14	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Corby & District Maths Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria Primary Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
De Montfort University	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Midland Initial Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edge Hill College of HE	20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*20
Gloucestershire ITE Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Goldsmiths College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grand Union Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Homerton College, Cambridge	1	—	16	—	10	—	—	8	—	—
Institute of Education	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	6	—	—
Keele University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent Training Group	—	*4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
King Alfred's College, Winchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
King's College London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
La Sainte Union College of HE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancaster University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Marches Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid Essex Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds Metropolitan University	46	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Additional places on initial teacher training courses 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98 PE	1998–99 PE	1997–98 art	1998–99 art	1997–98 music	1998–99 music	1997–98 RE	1998–99 RE	1997–98 other	1998–99 other
Lindisfarne SCITT	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Liverpool Hope College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	17	—	—
Liverpool John Moores University	29	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Loughborough University of Technology	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Manchester Metropolitan University	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	—	10
Marches Consortium	—	*5	—	—	—	—	—	*5	—	—
Maryvale Institute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid-Essex Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesex University	—	—	5	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nene College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newman Catholic Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newman College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Bedfordshire Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Riding College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West Kent Teacher Trainers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottingham Trent University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Open University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oxford Brookes University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Roehampton Institute	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	6	—	—
St. Martin's College	*10	—	5	20	—	—	—	6	—	—
Sheffield Hallam University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	—	—	—	*10	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull Secondary Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset SCITT Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Bank University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South West Teacher Training	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Mary's College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—
St. Thomas High School SCITT	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Douay Martyrs Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The North London Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Oxfordshire Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Shire Foundation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thomas Telford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Titan Partnership	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trinity & All Saints College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Bath	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Birmingham	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Brighton	15	—	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Bristol	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Cambridge	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—
University of Central England	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Derby	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Durham	20	—	—	—	—	6	—	3	—	—
University of East Anglia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	—	—
University of East London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Exeter	12	—	4	20	—	—	—	4	—	—
University of Greenwich	15	—	—	6	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Huddersfield	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Hull	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	2	—
Kent Training Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Leeds	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Leicester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Liverpool	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	—
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of North London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	*10	—	—	18	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Nottingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Oxford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Plymouth	—	—	—	8	—	4	—	—	—	—
University of Portsmouth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Reading	*10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Sheffield	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Southampton	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Sunderland	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	—	—
University of Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Warwick	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	16	—	—
University of West of England	—	—	15	5	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Wolverhampton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	—
University of York	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Urban Learning Foundation	—	—	—	—	—	—	*6	—	—	—
Wandsworth Primary Schools' Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Westhill College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands Consortium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Westminster College, Oxford	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	20	—	—

Special Schools

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority in England all specialist schools by specialism and pupil numbers and, for each local education authority, the percentage of its pupils in such schools. [59519]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information on pupil numbers in specialist schools is obtained from the School Performance Tables. The 1998 tables are due to be released in the week commencing 30 November and this information is not available until then. I shall write to my hon. Friend when the figures are available.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many new special schools have been *(a)* started and *(b)* completed in each of the last five years, indicating the council areas in which the schools are located. [59350]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is not held centrally. However, between February 1995 and October 1998, the Secretary of State approved the establishment of 51 special schools. Details of the Local Education Authorities are as follows:

February–December 1995[1]: Tower Hamlets, Liverpool, Bradford, Leicestershire (3 schools), Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, Wandsworth, Solihull, Nottinghamshire, Leicester City and Barking & Dagenham

January–December 1996: Hampshire, Durham (3 schools), Gateshead, Hereford & Worcester (2 schools), Hertfordshire, Bolton, Derbyshire (3 schools), Warwickshire and Wakefield

January–December 1997: Northamptonshire Somerset, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Durham, Lancashire (2 schools) and Trafford

January–October 1998: Waltham Forest, Newcastle (4 schools), Cheshire (2 schools), Wigan (6 schools), Trafford, Wandsworth and Essex

[1] First month national data were collected.

Student Loans Company

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the appointment of a new assessor for the Student Loans Company; and if he will publish the assessor's terms of reference. [60840]

Mr. Mudie: Dr. Graham Chandler, retired Registrar of the University of Nottingham, has accepted his reappointment as the independent Assessor for the Student Loans Company for a further three-year term from 1 January 1999 to 31 December 2001. I am placing details of his terms of reference in the Library.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55550]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Class Sizes

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in Oxfordshire at *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools were in classes with 31 or more children at the latest available time; and what are the corresponding figures for 12 months ago. [56906]

Ms Estelle Morris: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Education Provision

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures his Department has taken since May 1997 to improve the provision of education *(a)* in Coventry and *(b)* nationally. [57142]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 29 October 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the number of pre-school places per 1,000 of the population aged three and four, by local education authority, in each of the last three years. [59202]

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of pre-school closures which have resulted from the admission of three and four year olds to primary schools. [59290]

Ms Hodge: I will write to the hon. Members and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Union Learning Fund

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Union Learning Fund. [59346]

Mr. Mudie: I will writ to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mature Students

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to encourage more mature students to apply for full-time courses in higher education. [59262]

Mr. Mudie: *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Older Workers

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provision his Department is making to enable workers aged over 50 years to increase their prospects of employment. [59523]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Departmental Registers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the registers held by his Department which are open for inspection by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [59746]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what targets he has set to improve the take-up of NVQs; what financial allocation he has made to achieve these targets; and what is the preferred delivery mechanism. [60153]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 18 November 1998]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

National Textile Training Organisation

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the National Textile Training Organisation to be established. [60172]

Mr. Mudie: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Comprehensive Secondary Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many local education authority areas were operating *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly, comprehensive secondary school systems in (i) 1968, (ii) 1978, (iii) 1988 and (iv) 1998. [60187]

Ms Estelle Morris: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Schools (Computer Initiative)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of teachers in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* special schools, including grant maintained schools in each category in each local education authority have received a laptop computer as a result of Government initiatives. [59186]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Examination Statistics

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of schools had a smaller percentage of pupils gaining *(a)* five GCSEs at grades A-C and *(b)* five GCSEs at grades A-G, in 1998 than in 1994; and how many of those schools are in education action zones. [59189]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Home Teaching (Don Valley)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what number of parents in the last year for which figures are available in the Don Valley constituency voluntarily chose to teach their children at home, broken down by age of the child. [60455]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the Government's proposed regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 relating to the access to goods, services and facilities will exempt minor alterations which do not substantially affect the fabric of the premises. [60500]

Ms Hodge: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

A-level Results

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans he has to require examination boards to bring forward the date on which A-Level results are released; [60505]

(2) what plans he has to assist pupils who were deprived of a university place on the basis of A level results which initially failed to meet the required grades, but which were subsequently revised by an examination board with an admission of error on the part of the board. [60504]

Mr. Mudie: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

National Literary Guidance

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if schools may adopt national literacy guidance selectively. [60599]

Ms Estelle Morris: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Drugs

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consultation he has had with the Anti-drugs Coordinator relating to his Department's guidelines on the exclusion of schoolchildren from schools as a result of the misuse of illegal drugs. [60694]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Ethnic Minority Pupils

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will publish the findings of the study on funding for ethnic minority pupils. [60848]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to the hon. Member.

Children (Care Homes)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of children currently educated in a care home with education establishment have a criminal juvenile record; and what is the percentage for each of the last three years. [59210]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

Information is collected centrally on the care histories of children who are looked after. However, this does not include information on a child's criminal record.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Film Industry

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what proposals for action have been received from *(a)* the voluntary All-industry Fund, *(b)* the Film Marketing Agency and *(c)* the Skills Investment Fund in respect of the British film industry; [58488]

(2) if he will make a statement on the new training strategy for films as envisaged by the Film Policy Review Group. [58487]

Janet Anderson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on support for the film industry in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* other member states of the European Union and *(c)* the United States of America. [60266]

Janet Anderson: *(a)* My Department's support for the film industry in Britain is channelled through the British Film Institute, the British Film Commission, British Screen and the Arts Council of England. Following the results of my Department's Spending Review, we announced proposals to rationalise the delivery of public support to the film industry by the creation of a new film body, which would be able to take an overall strategic view of support for the film industry as a whole. We are currently holding discussions on the establishment of this new body.

The report of the Film Policy Review Group, A Bigger Picture, recommended a number of initiatives which would provide further support for the British film industry. Work on implementing those recommendations is underway and we expect the key elements to be in place by April next year.

(b) All the other member states of the European Union provide support for their film industries. Across the EU as a whole, there are around 54 aid measures distributing total public support to the audio-visual industries of around £470 million a year. France accounts for 39 per cent. of this figure, Germany 20 per cent, the UK 6 per cent, Italy 6 per cent., Spain 4.5 per cent. and Ireland 4 per cent. Most of this support is directed to the production sector: currently on Germany and France provide significant amounts of support for the distribution and exhibition sectors, making up 24 per cent. and 20 per cent. of those countries' total public support respectively.

Generally, support across the EU is geared towards projects rather than companies, but each member state organises its public support mechanisms in a different way. For example, Germany's support is marked by its regional component, France has a centralised structure and Italy draws largely on a credit mechanism and bank guarantees.

(c) I am not aware of any public support for the commercial film industry in the United States of America, although some states offer tax exemptions for film to attract productions to their area. Film culture and education are supported in the United States at the federal level by the National Endowment for the Arts, which funded programmes in media arts of nearly $3.4 million in 1996. There is also some funding available at the state level for local film commissions, film festivals and study grants to film schools.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60373]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60522]

Mr. Chris Smith: Non-departmental sponsored bodies have been encouraged to take on New Deal recruits. The National Lotteries Charities Board has plans to pilot the scheme with a view to taking on up to 18 New Deal recruits, and the Broadcasting Standards Commission are considering New Deal applicants to fill a current vacancy.

Museums

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what basis was used to calculate the funding required to compensate national museums which currently charge for admission for his plans to introduce universal free admission by 2001. [59934]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* Initial estimates of the requirement were made by Departmental officials. Further work on the detail of requisite funding allocations has been carried out in consultation with the national museums, including the issuing of detailed questionnaires in each case, and the analysis of any VAT implications that may arise.

Decisions on the adoption of the stages towards free admission remain of course with the Trustees of the individual museums.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans he has to amend the current concessionary television licence scheme for pensioners living in sheltered accommodation; [60392]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the appropriateness of the current level of concessionary television licences for pensioners living in sheltered accommodation. [60391]

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the review of legislation relating to BBC funding with particular reference to concessionary licences for disabled people and pensioners. [60422]

Janet Anderson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced details of the review of BBC funding on 14 October. It will cover a number of closely defined issues, including the structure of the current concessionary television licence scheme and possible alternative arrangements. The review panel will make recommendations to my right hon. Friend by the end of July next year, after which we shall consult on the panel's findings.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many pensioners in sheltered accommodation with an on-site warden qualified for a concessionary television licence in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available; and how many claimed their entitlement in each of these years; [60389]

(2) how many pensioners in sheltered accommodation have had their concessionary television licence withdrawn as a result of the removal of the on-site warden in each of the last 10 years. [60390]

Janet Anderson: TV Licensing records total membership of the scheme but cannot provide detailed breakdowns between pensioners and beneficiaries, or between recipients in sheltered housing and those in other qualifying accommodation (i.e. residential homes). Nor is information available on the number of people who are entitled to the concession but fail to apply, though the numbers are likely to be minimal. Approximately 629,000 units of accommodation were covered by a concessionary television licence in December 1988, compared with 644,000 in October 1998.

Creative Industries

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action will be taken, following the creative industries mapping exercise, to *(a)* protect intellectual property rights, *(b)* stimulate creativity and innovation amongst young people, *(c)* improve access to venture capital in new ways and *(d)* promote creative industry exports. [59781]

Janet Anderson: The Government are committed to ensuring that British talent is able to reap the rewards of its creativity. We are negotiating in Europe on the draft Copyright Directive and with counterparts in other countries on frameworks for intellectual property management and ways of helping industry combat piracy.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment set up the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education last year to look at creative and cultural development in young people. We expect a draft report shortly and we shall consider its recommendations in detail.

My Department is reviewing a possible networking seminar in conjunction with the DTI in the first half of next year, to bring together creative entrepreneurs with venture capitalists, corporate venturers and business angels, in order to facilitate understanding between them and establish ways in which they can work together.

The Creative Industries Export Promotion Advisory Group, which was set up at the Creative Industries Task Force's recommendation, is drawing up a series of export strategies based on clusters of creative industries which share certain characteristics. We anticipate that we will publish those in the course of next year.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost was of the creative industries task force; what the cost was of printing and distributing the mapping documents; how many mapping documents were printed; and what the cost of each document was. [59780]

Janet Anderson: The only quantifiable cost relating to the Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) is that of refreshments for meetings, which amount to £156 since its first meeting on 8 October 1997. Costs incurred by my department in copying and circulating papers for CITF are not separately recorded.

Publication of the mapping document, including design, print and paper costs and arrangements for the launch cost £53,000. We estimate that the full costs was around £110,000, but sponsorship secured us substantial savings on hire of the launch venue, print, paper and other costs. In addition, much of the initial research was done on Task Force's behalf free of charge.

5,000 copies of the document were printed. Distribution costs cannot be extrapolated from my Department's budget for postage and parcels. Although costs relating to the document's launch are included in the sum of £53,000, we cannot disaggregate these from publication costs. We therefore arrive at a cost per document of £10.60.

Sporting Events

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what dates in *(a)* July, *(b)* August, *(c)* September and *(d)* October he attended sporting events; and if he will list what these events were and where they took place. [59907]

Mr. Chris Smith: I attended the following events:

Wimbledon Men's Final on Sunday 5 July

Preston North End vs Gillingham at Deepdale Stadium on Saturday 26 September

In addition in May and June I attended:

Silk Cut Challenge Cup Final at Wembley on Saturday 2 May

Arsenal vs Everton at Highbury on Sunday 3 May

FA Cup Final at Wembley on Saturday 16 May

Second Cornhill Insurance Test Match between England and South Africa at Lord's on Sunday 21 June

World Cup: England vs Colombia in Lens on Friday 26 June.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has attended the following events during the same period. They were:

Wimbledon Ladies Final on Saturday 4 July

Amateur Athletics Association Championships at the NEC, Birmingham on Saturday 25 July

1998 INAS-FMS World Football Championships for Players with Learning Disabilities at Leicester City Football Ground on Thursday 30 July

Super Cup Match: Real Madrid vs Chelsea in Monte Carlo on Friday 28 August

Cornhill Insurance Test Match England vs Sir Lanka at Lord's on Monday 31 August

International Amateur Athletics Federation 8th World Cup in Johannesburg on Saturday 12 September

Surrey vs Leicestershire at the Oval on Friday 18 September

London Triathlon 1998 at the Docks on Sunday 20 September

The All Ireland Football Finals in Dublin on Sunday 27 September

England vs Bulgaria at Wembley on Saturday 10 October.

Civil Servants (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his private office, as at 1 October 1997; [56784]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin of civil servants in his Department, by grade, as at 1 October 1997. [56785]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, and indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55549]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* There have been no occasions on which I or Ministers in my Department have used RAF or privately charted aircraft.

Stonehenge

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what sum of money English Heritage has agreed to contribute towards the proposed road works in the vicinity of Stonehenge. [59426]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* English Heritage has offered to contribute £10m towards the cost of these works.

Royal Opera House

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will make a statement on the present relationship between the Royal Opera House and its principal private sponsors; [59933]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of the Royal Opera House. [59932]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The Government are wholly committed to a secure long-term future for opera and ballet of the highest quality in the redeveloped Royal Opera House. Convent Garden, post-reopening, will be a magnificent building, one of the most advanced and exciting venues for lyric theatre anywhere, and will provide a fitting stage for the dedicated artists of the Royal Ballet and Royal Opera. The building work at Convent Garden is now well advanced. We expect the House to reopen in late 1999, on time and on budget.

The Government are determined that the reopened House should be used to improve access to the arts, in particular through work to develop new audiences and education programmes, and to address fully the recommendations made by Sir Richard Eyre in his recent review of the future of lyric theatre in London.

In September, the Royal Opera House Board announced a radical strategy to put the House's affairs on a proper footing. The Government fully support this strategy. Constructive discussions have taken place between the management and trade unions towards flexible new working arrangements and I hope final agreement can be reached soon.

The future success of the House will depend on a close partnership of public and private investment. A key element of this will be the continued support of the private and corporate donors, whose great generosity and commitment to the House have not always been properly recognised. I pay tribute to their passionate support for the House and for the arts in this country. The personal involvement of the donors and their capacity for raising funds from the private sector should be warmly applauded.

Lottery Grants (East Midlands)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many Lottery grants were awarded to the East Midlands Region in *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1996; and of these how many in each period were for projects relating to (i) sports facilities, (ii) the theatre, (iii) music, (iv) dance and (v) the preservation of sites of historical interest. [59591]

Mr. Banks: To date the National Lottery has made 31,782 awards worth £5.53 billion across the UK. In the East Midlands there have been 1,700 awards worth £215.37m.

In the last 12 months to 31 October 1998 the East Midlands has received 246 awards worth £41.62m. In 1996, 297 awards were made in the East Midlands to the value of £29.31m. The table sets out the awards to sports

facilities, the theatre, music, dance and preservation of historical interest during these two periods. These are based on information provided by distributors.

Information on lottery awards is available on the Department's website www.lottery.culture.gov.uk.

National Lottery Awards to the East Midlands for the periods 1 January 1996–31 December 1996 and 1 November 1997–31 October 1998

Distributing body		*Sport facilities*	*Theatre*	*Music*	*Dance*	*Preservation*	*Total*
1/11/97 to 31/10/98							
Arts Council of England	Value	—	£557,686	£2,347,590	£457,546	—	£3,362,822
	No. of Awards	—	10	21	4	—	35
Heritage Lottery Fund	Value	—	—	—	—	£6,621,277	£9,659,417
	No. of Awards	—	—	—	—	44	61
National Lottery Charities Board	Value	£16,119	—	—	—	—	£12,653,833
	No. of Awards	1	—	—	—	—	154
The English Sports Council	Value	£8,814,970	—	—	—	—	£8,814,970
	No. of Awards	48	—	—	—	—	48
Millennium Commission	Value	—	—	—	—	—	£16,790,538
	No. of Awards	—	—	—	—	—	9
Total Value		£8,831,089	£557,686	£2,347,590	£457,546	£6,621,277	£51,281,580
Total No. of Awards		49	10	21	4	44	307
1/1/96 to 31/12/96							
Arts Council of England	Value	—	£1,907,331	£1,228,291	£1,849,721	—	£4,985,343
	No. of Awards	—	5	20	5	—	30
Heritage Lottery Fund	Value	—	—	—	—	£,9981,194	£54,556,956
	No. of Awards	—	—	—	—	12	17
National Lottery Charities Board	Value	—	£238,162	£38,291	£71,114	—	£16,728,051
	No. of Awards	—	1	1	2	—	229
The English Sports Council	Value	£17,053,420	—	—	—	—	£7,359,095
	No. of Awards	76	—	—	—	—	37
Millennium Commission	Value	—	—	—	—	—	£243,600
	No. of Awards	—	—	—	—	—	1
Total Value		£17,053,420	£2,145,493	£1,266,582	£1,920,835	£9,981,194	£83,873,045
Total No. of Awards		76	6	21	7	12	314

5,076,059,057.00

450,000,000.00

5,526,059,057.00

LEA Music Services

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about the arrangements for funding of LEA music services. [60431]

Ms Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Standards Agency

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Food Standards Agency will be independent of Government departments. [59154]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* This question is addressed in Chapter 6 of the White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: A Force For Change" (Cm3830), to which I have nothing further to add.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the dates of meetings over the last year which he has held about genetically modified organisms with *(a)* companies, indicating the name of the company in each case, *(b)* environmental non-Governmental organisations and *(c)* English Nature. [60604]

Mr. Rooker: In the past year MAFF Ministers have held the following meetings with companies, environmental non-governmental organisations and English Nature at which genetically modified organisms have been discussed.

Dates		
6 November 1997	Green City Wholefoods Rainbow Wholefoods	Minister of State
25 November 1997	Consumers Association	Minister of State
2 December 1997	Greenpeace	Minister of State
19 January 1998	Greenpeace Gene Watch Rainbow Wholefoods Holland and Barrett Iceland Nestle Redwood Company Safeways J Sainsbury PLC Swedish Foods Unilever	Minister of State and the Parliamentary Secretary (Commons)
1 April 1998	Iceland	Parliamentary Secretary (Lords)
29 June 1998	Monsanto	Minister of State
8 July 1998	Gene Watch Womens Environmental Network	Minister of State
15 July 1998	Monsanto	Minister
12 October 1998	Friends of the Earth	Minister of State
27 October 1998	RSPB	Minister
16 November 1998	English Nature	Minister of State

Agricultural Compensation

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amounts have been available in other EU member states for agricultural compensation since 1 May 1997 *(a)* directly from the EU budget and *(b)* as permitted by the Commission from member states' budgets; and what percentage of this has been claimed. [59658]

Mr. Rooker: Apart from the UK only three other Member States, Sweden, Italy and Ireland have been eligible for agrimonetary compensation since 1 May 1997. According to information supplied by the Commission, aid available from 1 May 1997, and amounts claimed, in these Member States is as follows:

Agrimonetary compensation available and claimed in other EU Member States since 1 May 1997 (all amounts stated in Mecu)

	Available		*Claim notified*	
	EU funded	*Nationally funded*	*EU funded*	*Nationally funded*
Ireland	123.15	123.15	122.9 (99.8%)	28.7 (23.3%)
Italy	206.1	206.1	123.65 (60%)	0.35 (0.16%)
Sweden	11.6	11.6	11.6 (100%)	6.1 (52.9%)

Meat Inspection

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish comparisons of charges made to ensure public health in respect of slaughter processing in the United Kingdom and in other EU states. [58446]

Mr. Nick Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *577*.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish comparisons of the amounts of state subsidy given to farmers and abattoirs in EU countries for meat inspection. [58447]

Mr. Nick Brown: In Great Britain the meat industry pays the full cost of the hygiene/welfare inspections carried out by the Meat Hygiene Service in licensed meat plants. However, the Government currently meet the cost of enforcing SRM controls in licensed slaughterhouses having announced on 25 February that these would not be recovered from industry from 1 April 1998 as had been planned.

So far as other EU Member States are concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *104*.

Pig Industry

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that (i) welfare, (ii) quality and (iii) traceability standards in the pig industry are raised in the European and international contexts; and if he will make a statement. [57787]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 November 1998]:* The Government have made clear their view that EU Directive 91/630 does not adequately protect the welfare of pigs and that EU standards should be improved to address their welfare needs. We will continue to press the European Commission for the early publication of its proposals for revision of the Directive. During the UK Presidency, the need for the EU to develop a strategy for achieving a more global basis for high farm animal welfare standards was placed firmly on the EU agenda.

I believe the higher quality standards met by British pig producers are a positive marketing advantage. The Government and the Meat and Livestock Commission are supporting the UK pig industry's initiatives to improve the quality of the domestic product. This will be emphasised by the introduction of the British Meat Standard for Quality Assured Pigmeat; a single independently audited quality assurance scheme. Such a scheme will allow retailers and caterers to highlight the advantages of the British product to the consumer.

The principal Community rules relating to the traceability standards for pigs are laid down in Council Directive 92/102/EEC on the identification and registration of animals. The European Commission sent a report to the Council earlier this year on the operation of this Directive. We have consulted with interested organisations on the report and are ready to discuss the issues in both the European and, as necessary, the international context.

Flood Prevention (Hendon)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress in relation to flood alleviation measures in the Edgware, Burnt Oak and Colindale areas of Hendon constituency. [60420]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has prepared an outline flood alleviation strategy for the whole of the Silk Stream catchment. The Ministry will be providing the Agency with feedback on the technical, economic and environmental aspects of this outline strategy shortly. It will then be for the Agency to continue to prepare a more detailed strategy with a view to obtaining the necessary approvals.

Taskforce 2000

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60225]

Mr. Morley: I note that the Taskforce 2000 analysis published on 11 November concludes that MAFF has made good progress with its millennium programme. We remain on schedule to complete work on business-critical systems by April 1999, but recognise that much work still remains to be done, for which resources have been allocated, if we are to achieve that target.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of MAFF's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Library of the House and published on the Internet.

Fishing

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will *(a)* establish and *(b)* financially assist an early retirement scheme for fishermen as a means of reducing fishing effort. [60179]

Mr. Morley: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance he will offer for the installation of safety equipment on fishing vessels under 10 metres in length. [60180]

Mr. Morley: Grants for the installation of safety equipment are currently available for fishing vessels of 12 m and over in length. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency are consulting the fishing industry on a Safety Code for under 12 m vessels. Once these consultations are complete and decisions have been taken on the code, I will consider the implications for vessel safety grants.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with which other states he has discussed the concept of coastal or zonal state management proposed by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. [59827]

Mr. Morley: There has not yet been an opportunity to discuss the NFFO and SFF's proposals formally with other Member States. However, the NFFO and SFF have themselves been discussing their ideas with their counterparts in other Member States and I shall be interested to see the outcome of these contacts.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce a scrap and build programme for fishing vessels under 10 m. [60182]

Mr. Morley: None.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria will be used to determine which applicants will be accepted into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in 1999; and if he will make a statement on the effects of the recent £1 million addition to the scheme's budget. [60175]

Mr. Morley: All applications for grants under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme are assessed against the aims and objectives of the Scheme and local priorities which are set at country level in consultation with MAFF's statutory advisers and interested organisations. Applications which offer the best environmental value for money are offered agreements.

The £1 million addition to the Countryside Stewardship budget announced recently is part of a total increase in scheme expenditure of £2 million.

The £1 million will be used to provide new Stewardship agreements in the upland areas of England. This will bring the total budget available for new agreements in 1999 to £7.5 million.

£0.5 million will be used to fund the Countryside Stewardship elements of the upland experiments in the Forest of Bowland and on Bodmin Moor. The aim of the experiment is to test how an integrated programme of agri-environment and rural development funds can work on a practical day to day level.

The remaining £0.5 million is to keep open the pilot Arable Stewardship scheme in 1999.

Calf Processing Scheme

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for changes in the calf processing scheme; and if he will postpone the changes until such time as the live export trade in calves reverts to its level in 1990. [60584]

Mr. Rooker: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Minister's statement to the House on 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 624–40. This is an EU scheme which is voluntary as from 1 December 1998, but the scheme lapses totally at the end of 1999. We could not, therefore, even if we were minded to do so, maintain it indefinitely.

Feedstuff Regulations

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the additional costs to local authorities of implementing the Feeding Stuffs (Establishments and Intermediaries) Regulations; and how these will be met. [60585]

Mr. Rooker: Local Authorities are to provide information shortly on the costs of enforcing these Regulations. When I have this information I will be able to make decisions on the funding of this work.

Fur Breeding Farms

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licensed fur breeding farms there are in England and Wales. [57409]

Mr. Morley: As at 30 October 1998, there were 14 licensed mink farms in England. There are currently no licensed fur farms in Wales.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60139]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* No particular problems have arisen in my Department, its Agencies or Non-Departmental Public Bodies from millennium compliance, other than those of a general nature facing most organisations and concerned with funding and accommodating a major and diverse programme of activity with potential wide impact.

Systems/services have been prioritised, and priority is being given to those of a business-critical nature, which will be compliant by April 1999. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 579, regarding the availability of further information on progress to date.

Nitrates

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he plans to take to reduce the elevated nitrate levels in streams and lakes. [59611]

Mr. Meale: I have been asked to reply.

Measures to combat elevated nitrate levels in streams and lakes are included in the requirements of the EC Urban Waste Treatment Directive (in relation to point sources of pollution such as sewage treatment works) and the EC Nitrate Directive, which aims to combat pollution of waters by agricultural sources of nitrate.

In both cases action is required where monitoring indicates that nitrate exceeds a level of 50mg/litre in surface or ground waters. Where levels of nitrate exceed this threshold, Nitrate Vulnerable Zones are designated under the terms of the Nitrate Directive. In Nitrate Vulnerable Zones farmers are required to take measures under action programmes, which are based on good agricultural practice for the use of fertilisers and manure.

Under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, waters where nitrate levels exceed 50mg/litre are designated as Sensitive Areas (Nitrate). Within these areas qualifying sewage treatment works are required to remove nitrogen from sewage effluent before it is discharged to the receiving waters.

WALES

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55557]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those that applied under the previous Administration.

Since May 1997, no Minister in my Department has used an aircraft belonging to the RAF or privately chartered an aircraft. In the year 1 May 1996 to 30 April 1997, the Department incurred costs of £7,837.27 on such travel.

School Inspections

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the total cost of school inspections in Wales in each year from 1990 to 1997 indicating separately *(a)* the administration costs of the Office of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools in Wales, *(b)* payments made by OHMCI, *(c)* costs to schools and *(d)* costs to local authorities. [58579]

Mr. Hain: Prior to 1992, HMI's main role was school inspection. Since 1992 inspections have increasingly been contracted out to Registered Inspectors enabling OHMCI to focus on its responsibilities for raising standards in schools, nursery settings and teacher training institutions. The frequency of school inspection has been increased so that all schools are inspected over a cycle of 5 years (6 years in the new cycle). OHMCI also inspects LEAs according to the requirements in the Education Act 1997 and assesses the quality and standards of work in further education colleges at the request of the Further Education Funding Council in Wales. From April 1999, OHMCI will also be responsible for inspecting the work of the Government funded training institutions and the Careers Service—giving them the widest remit of any comparable inspectorate in the UK. The rise in OHMCI's administrative costs between 1990 and 1998 reflects these evolving responsibilities.

The purpose of school inspection is to identify strengths and weaknesses so that schools may improve the quality of the education they provide and raise educational standards achieved by pupils. Schools and local authorities are not charged for school inspection.

OHMCI's administrative and programme costs are shown in the table:

OHMCI net administrative costs and programme expenditure

£000

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Administrative Costs[1]	2,471	2,670	4,570	3,122	3,208	3,374	2,974	2,720
Programme Costs[2]	[3]n/a	[3]n/a	64	837	2,435	3,922	5,009	4,783
Total	2,471	2,670	4,634	3,959	5,643	7,296	7,983	7,503

[1] Administrative costs are net expenditure on salaries and general administrative expenditure.
[2] Programme costs exclude capital expenditure and administrative costs, otherwise all net expenditure is shown—including school inspection, the training of Registered Inspectors and the provision of information services.
[3] Prior to 1992, there was a single budget line for all expenditure relating to the inspection of schools. Following the establishment in 1992 of OHMCI as a non-ministerial Government Department, programme costs relating to the statutory inspection cycle were identified separately.

Agricultural Production

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the problems facing sheepmeat, beef and dairy production; and if he will make a statement. [59517]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Welsh Office Ministers have received numerous representations on the problems facing the livestock and dairy sectors and have met with both the farming unions and farmers' deputations on several occasions.

The Government have just announced a further major aid package totalling more than £120 million which will provide valuable immediate assistance to the industry. Welsh farmers will receive over £21 million of this, which will mean around on average £1,500 extra for cattle and sheep farmers in the Less Favoured Areas of Wales.

We appreciate that this is only a short-term solution and both my right hon. Friend and I are concerned to help farming in Wales adapt so that it can have a viable and prosperous long-term future. This is why the Welsh Office has established three industry-led working groups to develop action plans for taking forward the Food Strategy in the lamb and beef, dairy and organic food sectors. The action plans are due to be published in the New Year and the Welsh Office and the WDA will be working with the industry to take these plans forward.

Educational Psychologists

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of Welsh-speaking educational psychologists in Wales. [60386]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is not available centrally. The training and recruitment of educational psychologists and Welsh speaking educational psychologists in particular was an issue recognised in our Special Educational Needs (SEN) Green Paper review and is being considered by the Department and the Welsh Advisory Group on SEN (WAGSEN).

Poll Tax

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the amount of money owed relating to the former poll tax, indicating the former district and borough councils affected; and if he will make a statement. [60549]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The latest available information on community charge arrears for the former district and borough councils is given in the table.

Arrears of community charge are now collected by unitary authorities. These figures cannot be split into figures for the former district and borough councils. The total amount in arrears as at 31 March 1998 was £10.5 million.

Estimated arrears of community charge at 31 March 1996

	£000
Aberconwy	256
Alyn and Deeside	213
Arfon	532
Blaenau Gwent	523
Brecknock	125
Cardiff	3,413
Carmarthen	216
Ceredigion	367
Colwyn	303
Cynon Valley	239
Delyn	191
Dinefwr	464
Dwyfor	32
Glyndwr	183
Islwyn	373
Llanelli	561
Lliw Valley	170
Meirionnydd	63
Merthyr Tydfil	245
Monmouth	438
Montgomeryshire	89
Neath	405
Newport	1,545
Ogwr	1,253
Port Talbot	213
Preseli Pembrokeshire	172
Radnorshire	36
Rhondda	184
Rhuddlan	818
Rhymney Valley	638
South Pembrokeshire	287
Swansea	1,139
Taff Ely	529
Torfaen	847
Vale of Glamorgan	645
Wrexham Maelor	1,985
Ynys Mon	482
Total Wales	20,174

Note:
The figures shown are the amounts outstanding at 31 March 1995, less amounts collected between 1 April 1995 and 31 march 1996.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount so far of council house sales receipts that he has released to each of the housing authorities of Wales to date; what amounts he proposes to release; what amount of sales receipts each housing authority in Wales holds; and if he will make a statement. [60556]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The amounts allocated to each of the unitary authorities in Wales under the Capital Receipts Initiative (CRI) in 1997–98 and 1998–99, and the amounts of receipts from the sale of council housing held by each unitary authority in Wales at 31 March 1998, are in the tables. The distributions under the CRI took account of the cumulative set aside receipts for each authority since 1990, not the cash held from set aside receipts.

My right hon. Friend is currently consulting on spending plans for Welsh Office programmes for the next three financial years and on changes to the local authority housing capital distribution arrangements. He will announce his decisions later in the year.

Allocations under the capital receipts initiative

£000

Unitary authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Blaenau Gwent	327	1,059
Bridgend	378	1,223
Caerphilly	646	2,097
Cardiff	883	2,861
Carmarthenshire	641	2,083
Ceredigion	184	599
Conwy	257	836
Denbighshire	217	708
Flintshire	364	1,181
Gwynedd	401	1,305
Isle of Anglesey	174	561
Merthyr Tydfil	214	693
Monmouthshire	289	932
Neath Port Talbot	593	1,919
Newport	411	1,327

Allocations under the capital receipts initiative

£000

Unitary authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Pembrokeshire	395	1,286
Powys	360	1,162
Rhondda Cynon Taff	734	2,380
Swansea	742	2,407
Torfaen	464	1,496
Vale of Glamorgan	308	995
Wrexham	558	1,810
Total available for capital spending	9,540	30,920
Revenue cover for additional consequent borrowing charges	—	2,460
Total	9,540	33,380

Receipts held from the sale of council housing, at 31 March 1998

£000

Unitary authority	*Amount*
Blaenau Gwent	5,793
Bridgend	1,084
Caerphilly	21,601
Cardiff	12,797
Carmarthenshire	11,575
Ceredigion	10,670
Conwy	7,348
Denbighshire	786
Flintshire	181
Gwynedd	5,043
Isle of Anglesey	0
Merthyr Tydfil	6,748
Monmouthshire	14,374
Neath Port Talbot	22,177
Newport	20,621
Pembrokeshire	8,071
Powys	1,152
Rhondda Cynon Taff	0
Swansea	1,231
Torfaen	2,592
Vale of Glamorgan	31,193
Wrexham	65
Wales	185,102

Minimum Wage

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* young people who will benefit from the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 indicating the employment sectors in which the main impact of the Act will be felt. [60548]

Mr. Hain: Figures provided by the Office for National Statistics estimate that 578,000 men and 1,388,000 women in the UK will benefit from the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. Of these 1,966,000, 221,000 are young people aged between 18 and 21.

Comparable figures are not available for Wales. However, it is estimated that 133,000 people in Wales should benefit.

The economic sectors in the UK in which the impact of the Act are expected to be felt are: Hotels and Restaurants; Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry; Other Community Workers; Wholesale and Retail; Health and Social Work. It is not possible to produce a similar analysis for Wales.

Disabled People

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people in Wales with disabilities broken down by disability group. [60547]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The number of people on local authority disability registers in Wales at 31 March 1998 is shown, by register category in the Registers of people with physical and sensory disabilities:

Disability registers	*Number*
Deaf with speech	1,497
Deaf without speech	955
Hard of hearing	5,658
Blind	8,958
Partially sighted	8,681
General classes[1]	72,839
Total for registers of people with physical and sensory disabilities	98,588
Registers of people with learning disabilities	11,771
Total of all people on disability	110,359
Rate per 1,000 population—all people on disability registers	37.7

[1] Includes 1997 data for 2 authorities

The Register of physically and sensorily disabled persons includes people registered under Section 29 of the National Assistance Act 1948. The Register of persons with learning disabilities is based on people identified and known to local authorities. The numbers of these registers are believed to understate the total number of people with disabilities as some people choose not to be included.

The most recent comprehensive sample survey was the OPCS survey of disability in Great Britain, published in 1988, which showed that the estimated prevalence of disability in Wales, per thousand population, was 170 for people aged 16 or over and 31 for children. Applying these rates to the 1997 population of Wales would give an estimated number of 414,000 people with disabilities (an overall rate of 141 per thousand population).

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on by training and enterprise councils under the New Deal arrangements. [60413]

Mr. Hain: One Training and Enterprise Council in Wales has signed a New Deal employer agreement. By the end of October 1998, no New Deal participants had been recruited by Training and Enterprise Councils.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on by *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* health trusts under the New Deal arrangements. [60411]

Mr. Hain: Sixteen Health Trusts and one Health Authority in Wales have signed New Deal employer agreements. By the end of October 1998, five New Deal participants had been recruited by Health Trust and none by Health Authorities.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of grant aid from his Department. [60536]

Mr. Hain: By the end of October 1998, no New Deal participants had been recruited by Non-Departmental Public Bodies in receipt of grant aid from the Welsh Office.

I and my Ministerial colleagues will be writing shortly to all Non-Departmental Public Bodies funded by the Welsh Office to encourage them to recruit New Deal participants.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by each of the health authorities in Wales. [60534]

Mr. Hain: One Health Authority in Wales has signed a New Deal employer agreement. By the end of October 1998, no New Deal participants had been recruited by Health Authorities.

Health Structures Reorganisation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy in respect of the links between Llandudno General Hospital and Ysbytu Gwynedd, Bangor, following the current reorganisation of health structures in North Wales. [60396]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: An announcement on the proposals to reconfigure NHS trusts in Wales will be made shortly. This will take account of the management arrangements for Llandudno General Hospital.

Prescriptions

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of prescriptions written by GPs in Wales in the last year for those drug products which were signalled in the new edition of the British National Formulary as less than suitable for prescribing. [60397]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I shall write to the right hon. Member as soon as possible, and place a copy of the reply in the Library of the House.

Occupational Therapists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of occupational therapists working in Wales. [60393]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information on the number of occupational therapy staff directly employed by the NHS is given in the table.

Occupational therapy staff in post at 30 June 1998 (whole-time equivalents)

	Number
Qualified staff	
Manager	19
Therapist	445
Instructor/teacher	198
Tutor	2
Other staff	
Helper/assistant	122
Health care assistant	7
Other support staff	14

Local Authority Ward Boundaries

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the areas where the boundaries for local authority wards for 1999 elections have not yet been determined. [60394]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To date, we have received reports from the Local Government Boundary Commission covering 17 authorities as follows: Neath Port Talbot, Denbighshire, Swansea, Powys, Carmarthenshire, Flintshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Wrexham, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Pembrokeshire, Conwy, the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Newport, Gwynedd and Cardiff.

The recommendations made by the Commission in all but Newport, Vale of Glamorgan and Gwynedd have been accepted and will be implemented in time for the 1999 elections. Draft orders will be laid before the House shortly.

We have recently asked the Commission to look again at its recommendations for Newport and the Vale of Glamorgan.

A revised report covering Gwynedd was submitted to us by the Commission in September. This was then subject to a statutory six week consultation period, which has only recently finished. We will be considering the Commission's proposals for Gwynedd shortly. If agreed, it will be too late for implementation by the May 1999 elections as preparations for these elections are already in hand.

The Commission has until December 1999 to report on electoral arrangements in Anglesey, Ceredigion, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, and Torfaen.

Noise Mitigation

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce revised criteria for dealing with requests for noise mitigation on existing trunk roads built before current standards were introduced. [60696]

Mr. Hain: Our plans to introduce revised criteria relating to noise mitigation matters were included (at paragraph 3.8) in the report on the review of the Welsh trunk road programme "Driving Wales Forward" published on 28 July. We are liaising with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on this matter and a separate announcement will be made in due course.

Millennium Stadium

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with representatives of Laing concerning the completion of the Millennium Stadium. [60458]

Mr. Hain: None. This is a matter for Millennium Stadium plc.

Welsh Assembly Site

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review the decision on the site for the Welsh Assembly. [60460]

Mr. Michael: I am still receiving briefing on the present proposals from my officials.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Leader of Cardiff County Council concerning the use of Cardiff City Hall as the site of the Welsh Assembly. [60459]

Mr. Michael: None.

Health Trust Mergers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to announce the results of his review of health trust mergers. [60461]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: An announcement will be made shortly.

Testicular Cancer

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of testicular cancer have occurred in Wales in *(a)* each of the last three years and *(b)* during the period 1985 to 1988. [60802]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information for the latest three years for which data are available and for 1985 to 1988 is as follows:

New casts of testicular cancer registered

Year	*Amount*
1985	56
1986	68
1987	75
1988	70
1992	67
1993	72
1994	72

Breast Cancer

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the level of audit by health authorities of breast cancer treatment outcomes. [60601]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Public Health Common Data Set contains mortality data for breast cancer by health authority but information on survival is not yet collected. The current development by the Cancer Services Co-ordinating Group of a cancer information strategy for Wales to be put in place during 1999 will address this issue.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the level of training provided in each health authority for general practitioners in breast cancer follow up. [60609]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not held centrally. Responsibility for postgraduate education for general practitioners rests with the GP Sub Dean in the School of Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education based in the University of Wales College of Medicine.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) doctors, (ii) nurses and (iii) administrative staff involved in providing breast care services have received training in communication skills. [60614]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not held centrally. However, all doctors and nurses have to undergo training in communications skills as part of their pre-registration curriculum.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what percentage of women receive the triple assessment for breast cancer recommended in "Improving Outcomes in Breast Cancer"; [60607]

(2) what percentage of test results for breast cancer patients are available within five working days. [60613]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not held centrally. However, such information will be obtained from a prospective audit of referrals to specialist breast teams to be undertaken in January 1999 by the Cancer Services Co-ordinating Group.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the location of multi-disciplinary breast cancer teams working with a written protocol as a benchmark to manage co-ordinated care. [60610]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The location of multi-disciplinary breast cancer teams in Wales was published on 4 November 1998 in the Annual Report of the Cancer Services Co-ordinating Group. I will arrange for copies of the report to be placed in the Library of the House. All multi-disciplinary teams are required to work to the minimum standards for breast cancer care which include the requirement to work within documented evidence-based local policies based on national guidelines.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the involvement of general practitioners in each health authority in developing local arrangements for the follow up of primary breast cancer patients. [60611]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: General Practitioners should, with their local multi-disciplinary team for breast cancer, develop arrangements to ensure patients receive continuing care. The new Local Health Groups will have an important role to ensure that this happens.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many trusts which provide a breast cancer service have *(a)* a written communications policy and *(b)* a protocol for communication with patients. [60612]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not held centrally. However, the cancer centres in Velindre and Singleton NHS trusts are piloting patient-held records with a view to improving communication between trusts, primary care and patients, their families and carers.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of prostate cancer have occurred in Wales *(a)* in each of the last three years and *(b)* during the period 1985 to 1988. [60619]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information for the latest three years for which data are available and for 1985 to 1988 is as follows:

New cases of prostate cancer registered in Wales

Year	Amount
1985	693
1986	676
1987	698
1988	726
1992	1,008
1993	1,156
1994	1,219

Cancer (Survival and Death Rates)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by tumour site the cancer *(a)* survival and *(b)* death rates in the last year for which figures are available. [60608]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Data on survival rates, for England and Wales, were published by the Office for National Statistics in 'Population and Health' Monitor MB1 98/1, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Data relating to Wales only are not currently available.

The available information on deaths by site of cancer, from the Office for National Statistics, is detailed in the following table. The data relate to deaths of Welsh residents occurring in 1997.

1997 death rate per 100,000 population

	ICD9 code[1]	Persons	Males	Females
Lip, oral cavity and pharynx	140–149	3.5	4.5	2.5
Digestive organs and peritoneum	150–159	84.2	92.8	76.0
Of which:				
Oesophagus	150	13.8	16.5	11.3
Stomach	151	15.5	20.0	11.2
Small intestine and colon	152–153	25.0	24.9	25.2
Colon	153	24.5	24.6	24.4
Rectum, rectosigmoid junction and anus	154	9.6	11.9	7.4
Liver, gallbladder and bile ducts	155–156	5.2	5.5	5.0
Pancreas	157	11.8	10.7	12.8
Larynx	161	2.0	3.6	0.5
Trachea, bronchus and lung	162	61.4	78.5	44.9
Skin	172–173	3.2	2.7	3.7
Female breast	174	—	—	47.7
Genitourinary organs	179–189	46.9	58.1	36.2
Of which:				
Uterus, other and unspecified	179,182	—	—	5.5
Cervix uteri	180	—	—	4.8
Ovary	183	—	—	15.3
Prostate	185	—	37.3	—
Testis	186	—	0.3	—
Bladder	188	8.6	13.0	4.4
Kidney	189	5.2	6.7	3.7
Nervous system	191–192	5.5	6.8	4.2
Lympathic and haematopoietic tissue	200–208	20.1	22.5	17.7
Of which:				
Hodgkin's disease	201	0.5	0.7	0.4
Other malignant neoplasm of lymphoid and histiocytic tissue	202	7.5	8.3	6.7
Multiple myeloma and immunoproliterative neoplasms	203	3.9	4.3	3.5
Leukaemia	204.208	8.1	9.1	7.1
Myeloid leukaemia	205	4.6	4.7	4.5
All malignant neoplasms	140–208	282.7	302.5	263.8

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th revision

Education Spending (Pupils)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local authority the spending per pupil in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [60615]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is given in the table.

(a) Gross revenue expenditure on schools

Expenditure per pupil (£)

	Cash values			*Constant 1998–99 prices*		
Local authority	*(b) 1996–97*	*(c) 1997–98*	*(c) 1998–99*	*(b) 1996–97*	*(c) 1997–98*	*(c) 1998–99*
Blaenau Gwent	2,321	2,170	2,402	2,447	2,230	2,402
Bridgend	2,303	2,176	2,388	2,428	2,236	2,388
Caerphilly	2,253	2,129	2,323	2,376	2,187	2,323
Cardiff	2,131	2,041	2,245	2,246	2,097	2,245
Carmarthenshire	2,428	2,490	2,750	2,560	2,559	2,750
Ceredigion	2,723	2,680	3,015	2,870	2,754	3,015
Conwy	2,265	2,072	2,350	2,388	2,129	2,350
Denbighshire	2,224	2,032	2,305	2,344	2,088	2,305
Flintshire	2,132	2,087	2,321	2,247	2,144	2,321
Gwynedd	2,527	2,406	2,608	2,664	2,473	2,608
Isle of Anglesey	2,362	2,345	2,541	2,490	2,409	2,541
Merthyr Tydfil	2,319	2,305	2,471	2,444	2,369	2,471
Monmouthshire	2,208	2,208	2,422	2,327	2,269	2,422
Neath Port Talbot	2,334	2,355	2,502	2,461	2,419	2,502
Newport	2,155	2,170	2,377	2,271	2,230	2,377
Pembrokeshire	2,460	2,412	2,625	2,594	2,479	2,625
Powys	2,597	2,555	2,819	2,737	2,625	2,819
Rhondda Cynon Taff	2,317	2,385	2,505	2,443	2,450	2,505
Swansea	2,259	2,195	2,339	2,382	2,255	2,339
Torfaen	2,161	2,099	2,274	2,278	2,157	2,274
Vale of Glamorgan	2,072	1,903	2,141	2,184	1,956	2,141
Wrexham	2,179	2,047	2,339	2,297	2,103	2,339
Wales	2,283	2,223	2,431	2,407	2,284	2,431

Notes:
(a) Includes all pre primary, primary, secondary and special schools, including grant maintained schools, plus pupil referral units. Includes re-charged schools management and administration costs, recoupment, school meals and the use of specific grants and reserves. Excludes nursery vouchers for 1997–98 and education service strategy and regulation throughout. The pupil numbers use the headcount of part time pupils, rather that the full time equivalent
(b) Outturn
(c) Budgets

Departmental Support (Jobs)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* new jobs created and *(b)* existing jobs protected since May 1997 by the provision of financial support from his Department. [60618]

Mr. Hain: A range of services which include the provision of financial support are operated by the Welsh Office. Information on all of these is not held centrally in the form requested.

The main form of direct financial support available to companies wishing to pursue investment projects in Wales is Regional Selective Assistance (RSA).

Since 1 May 1997, RSA offers worth £133 million have been accepted by firms toward 193 projects. This amount was in total associated with the creation of 14,744 new jobs and the safeguarding of 2,957 existing jobs over the estimated 3 to 5 year life of each project.

Funding (Farmers)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the additional funding he has made available to farmers since May 1997 to cover the costs of food safety and public assurance measures which would otherwise have been met by the agricultural sector. [60716]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Separate figures for Wales are not available. However, the Government decided that charges for implementing the Specified Risk Material (SRM) controls in licensed slaughterhouses and cutting plants would not be recovered from the industry from 1 April 1998 as originally intended. This represents a saving to the industry in Great Britain of around £35 million.

The Government also decided to meet the costs of setting up the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) and of running it for its first full year of operation; the CTS became operational in September this year. This represents another total saving of £35 million to the industry in Great Britain, £15 million in start-up costs and £20 million in running costs including enforcement.

HELIOS Programme

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about Welsh involvement in the HELIOS programme of the European Union since its inception. [60617]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: HELIOS II was established by a decision of the European Council in February 1993. The key aims of the programme were to promote the integration of, and equal opportunities for disabled people.

Four organisations from Wales were selected to take part in the HELIOS II programme. The Welsh Office was a member of the HELIOS II Co-ordinating Committee. The programme finished in 1996 and no successor programme has been established.

Housing Starts

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the *(a)* planned and *(b)* actual housing starts made by housing associations in each of the last four years for which figures are available. [60620]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is:

Year	*Planned starts*	*Actual starts*
1994–95	3,900	3,614
1995–96	3,500	3,688
1996–97	2,900	3,200
1997–98	2,000	2,468

Inter-sector Working Relationships

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list his policies which are aimed at promoting better working relationships between *(a)* his Department and the voluntary sector and *(b)* local government and the voluntary sector. [60616]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales launched the Compact between the Government and the voluntary sector in Wales (Cm 4107) at the Conference of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action in Llandudno this morning. We will be promoting the principles contained within the Compact to all public bodies in Wales including local authorities building on the work carried out jointly by the Welsh Local Government Association and Wales Council for Voluntary Action in the document "Achieving Shared Aims" which the Under-Secretary my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), launched last February.

Health Trusts (New Deal)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by each of the health trusts in Wales. [60535]

Mr. Hain: By the end of October 1998, five New Deal participants had been recruited by Health Trusts in Wales:

1 by Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust;

1 by Glan Clwyd DGH NHS Trust;

1 by Glan Y Mor NHS Trust;

1 by Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust;

1 by Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust.

In addition, 11 other Health Trusts have signed New Deal employer agreements.

Housing Stock

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money *(a)* the Welsh Office *(b)* Tai Cymru and *(c)* local authorities invested in improving housing stock in Wales in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 1998; and what is the projected figure for 1999. [60659]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The available information is as set out.

Total Welsh Office allocations for housing capital expenditure to Tai Cymru and unitary authorities for new build and improvements:

1996–97 £343 million;

1997–98 £274 million;

1998–99 £277 million.

Housing capital expenditure by unitary authorities:

1996–97 £266 million;

1997–98 £236 million (provisional);

1998–99 £226 million (provisional).

Tai Cymru gross capital expenditure:

1996–97 £99 million;

1997–98 £71 million;

1998–99 £71 million (provisional).

My right hon. Friend is currently consulting on spending plans for Welsh Office programmes for the next three financial years. He will announce his decisions later in the year.

County Council Wards

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what response he plans to make to the recommendation of the Boundary Commission on the configuration of county council wards in *(a)* the Tremadog and Beddgelert areas and *(b)* the Talysarn and Nantlle area of Gwynedd. [60724]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: We received the revised report for Gwynedd from the Local Government Boundary Commission in September. The statutory six week consultation period has come to an end only recently and we will be considering the Commission's recommendations shortly. In coming to a view, we will, of course, take into account any representations that have been made in response to the Commission's recommendations.

Loan Debt

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the outstanding *(a)* total and *(b)* per capita levels of loan debt by each local authority in Wales at 31 March 1997. [60819]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is given in the table.

Outstanding loan debt as at 31 March 1997[1]

	£000	*£ per head*
Blaenau Gwent	62,544	857
Bridgend	90,155	690
Caerphilly	94,757	560
Cardiff	210,456	668
Carmarthenshire	114,822	679
Ceredigion	44,380	638
Conwy	75,111	679
Denbighshire	69,231	766
Flintshire	102,728	709
Gwynedd	86,287	733
Isle of Anglesey	55,723	831
Merthyr Tydfil	41,480	714
Monmouthshire	44,522	513
Neath Port Talbot	108,393	777
Newport	114,482	837
Pembrokeshire	85,934	756
Powys	101,715	818

Outstanding loan debt as at 31 March 1997[1]

	£000	£ per head
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	139,068	579
Torfaen	76,066	841
The Vale of Glamorgan	78,033	657
Wrexham	83,316	666
Wales	2,075,253	710

[1] Net of amounts set-aside as provision for credit liabilities. Includes amounts inherited from predecessor authorities and administered on behalf of other authorities.

Source:

The Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1998–99 (Revised)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the outstanding *(a)* total and *(b)* per capita levels of loan debt by each local authority in Wales at 31 March 1998. [60832]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is currently being collected. The total amount of outstanding loan debt at 31 March 1998 and information on relevant populations will be published in the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1999–2000 in February 1999.

Rural Development Grant Scheme

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the projects approved and awaiting the release of funding under the Rural Development Grant Scheme. [60821]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which projects that received conditional approval under the 7th round of the EAGGF Objective 5b programme before 30 June are still awaiting confirmation of rural development grant matching funding; and if he will make a statement. [60822]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Twenty-one bids for Rural Development Grant (RDG) matching funding have been received under Round 7. The details remain commercial in confidence between the Department and the applicants.

RDG is a grant of last resort designed to pump prime projects where there is a shortfall of alternative public support funding. The grant awards will be decided at the conclusion of the Department's Internal Review Process.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to make an announcement on the allocation of rural development grants for the 8th round of the EAGGF project applications. [60823]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a decision on the allocations at the conclusion of the Department's Internal Review process.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects *(a)* the 7th round rural development grants to be paid and *(b)* the Welsh Office Internal Review to be completed. [60824]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Payment of Rural Development Grant will depend on the phasing of expenditure on the individual projects.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to make an announcement about allocations for future spending plans in the near future.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55546]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* My noble Friend the Under-Secretary will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Business Euro Label

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the planned use of the Business Euro label. [59796]

Ms Quin: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

European Adventure Project

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the (i) purpose, (ii) cost and (iii) target audience of the European Adventure Project, Llandaff. [59805]

Ms Quin: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

London Conference (European Association)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of his Department in the organisation of the London Conference held on 3 April to promote the role of associations and foundations in Europe, pursuant to COM 97/241; what the cost was; if he will list those organisations which took part; and what the relevant budget line was. [59795]

Ms Quin: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Our Europe Association

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will deposit in the Library a list of *(a)* seminars held by the Our Europe Association for 1997 and *(b)* criteria for selection of such; what was the UK share of the funding; and if any representatives of Her Majesty's Government attended in an official capacity. [59798]

Ms Quin: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Laos

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy on establishing international recognition of the Laos Government; and what support his Department has provided to Laos. [60039]

Mr. Fatchett: The United Kingdom recognises states rather than Governments. We have normal diplomatic relations with Laos. The British Ambassador to Bangkok is accredited to Vientiane and visits regularly. The UK provides a small package of bilateral assistance to Laos, concentrating on demining, health, education, and rural development.

Youth for Europe

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *246*, if he will make a statement on the plans of Youth for Europe to develop *(a)* European solidarity and *(b)* European awareness; and if the definition of Europe is synonymous with the European Union. [59998]

Ms Quin: Negotiations are at an advanced stage on a new European youth programme, to incorporate the main features of the current Youth for Europe III and European Voluntary Service programmes, which run out at the end of 1999.

The aims of the new Youth programme include:

- to promote an active contribution by young people to the building of Europe through their participation in transnational exchanges;
- to strengthen their sense of solidarity through transnational community-service activities.

The new programme, like the current Youth for Europe III, will promote exchanges with young people from non member countries. The proposed programme will be open to the participation of the States of the European Free Trade Area as well as the associated Central and Eastern European countries, Turkey, Cyprus, and Malta, according to the conditions established in the respective agreements with these countries. Accordingly, the definition of Europe stretches beyond the European Union. We continue to welcome and support action in this field.

Visa Applications

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 5 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *637*, of the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), which were the countries of application of those people refused visit visas in the last three years. [59881]

Mr. Fatchett: As at 31 December 1997 there were visa issuing Posts in the following countries.

Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Bolivia
Bosnia Herzogovina
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burma
Cameroon
Canada
Chile
China
Colombia
Costa Rica
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic Republic of Congo
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Estonia
Ethiopia
Falkland Islands
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia, The
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Gibraltar
Greece
Guatemala
Guyana
Honduras
Hong Kong
Holy See
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Irish Republic
Israel
Italy
Ivory Coast
Jamaica

Japan
Jerusalem
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Korea
Kuwait
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Libya
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Macedonia
Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Malta
Mauritius
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russian Federation
Rwanda
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Singapore
Slovak Republic
Solomon Islands
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
St. Helena
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Syria
Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkmenistan
Turkey
Uganda
Ukraine
UAE
United States
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Vietnam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

During the period 1995–1997 Posts in all the countries and Dependent Territories listed above, except the following, refused a number of visit visas.

1995	*1996*	*1997*
Algeria	Algeria	Algeria
Argentina	Ascension Island	Ascension Island
Ascension Island	Bermuda	Bahamas
Bahamas	Bolivia	Belize
Bermuda	Costa Rica	Bermuda
Bolivia	El Salvador	Costa Rica
Costa Rica	Falkland Islands	Falkland Islands
El Salvador	Gibraltar	Gibraltar
Falkland Islands	Guatemala	Guatemala
Gibraltar	Holy See	Honduras
Guatemala	Iceland	Iceland
Honduras	Macedonia	Libya
Iceland	Morocco	Macedonia
Lesotho	Nicaragua	Morocco
Macedonia	Panama	Nicaragua
Morocco	Papua New Guinea	Panama
New Zealand	Solomon Islands	Solomon Islands
Nicaragua	Switzerland	Spain
Solomon Islands	Taiwan	Switzerland
Spain	Tonga	Taiwan
Uruguay	Uruguay	Tonga
Switzerland	Vanuatu	Turkmenistan
Taiwan		Uruguay
Tonga		Vanuatu

This Department publishes visa statistics in the booklet 'Global Entry Clearance Statistics'. Copies of this booklet covering the period 1995–1997 will shortly be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Counter-drug Agreement

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *126–27*, when and where he will ratify the agreement by the UK and the USA concerning maritime and aerial operations in the Caribbean, signed in Washington on 13 July. [59813]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 16 November 1998]:* The Agreement between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States concerning Maritime and Aerial Operations to Suppress Illicit Trafficking by Sea in Waters of the Caribbean and Bermuda provides for entry into force upon exchange of notes between the parties indicating that they have completed the necessary internal procedures. Before such notification can be made implementing legislation must be in place in the Caribbean Overseas Territories and Bermuda. The Agreement will be published as a Command Paper and laid before Parliament in the usual way by 2 December.

Radioactive Gases (Cap La Hague)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the French Government about radioactive gases emitted from the nuclear power station at Cap La Hague. [60110]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not personally made any representations to the French Government about the nuclear facility at Cap de la Hague. However, British and French officials continue to discuss discharge from nuclear facilities in both countries.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 9 and 10 November. [60385]

Ms Quin: The General Affairs Council in Brussels on 9–10 November adopted the A points listed in document 12595/98 and noted the resolutions, decisions and opinions adopted by the European Parliament in its session of 19 October to 23 October and listed in document 11727/98. Copies of the documents listing the A points and resolutions will be placed in the House Libraries as soon as they become available.

On 10 November the EU held successful ministerial meetings of the Accession Conferences with Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. The Conferences opened substantive negotiations at ministerial level and marked another milestone in the accession process. Association Councils with Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were also held on 10 November.

The GAC reviewed progress in the Agenda 2000 negotiation. Many Member States called for an increase in the pace of negotiation, in particular on the Common Agricultural Policy. The Foreign Secretary called for more progress on CAP reform. Subject to the general rule that no element in the package can be agreed finally until there is agreement on the package as a whole, there was widespread agreement in principle to the Commission's draft pre-accession instruments, though Spain maintained a reserve. The Presidency said that there would be a conclave of Foreign Ministers on 6 December. There was also discussion of a number of detailed aspects of structural funding.

The Commission presented its progress reports on the candidate countries, in advance of discussion at the Vienna European Council.

The Council discussed the humanitarian situation in Russia and agreed that, should Russia formally request food aid from the EU, the Council would examine urgently a Commission proposal on that basis. The Council will discuss a further report on EU policy and assistance to Russia at the 7 December GAC.

The Commission presented two draft regulations on funding the European Strategy for Turkey. The Presidency remitted the proposals for further discussion in Coreper.

The Commission explained progress on the EU/Switzerland negotiations. Ministers urged continued efforts by both sides towards early agreement. The 7 December General Affairs Council may consider this further.

Ministers had an exchange of views on the Middle East Peace Process with EU Special Envoy Miguel Moratinos present, following the Wye River memorandum. They underlined the importance of the speedy implementation of the Memorandum, the need to avoid unilateral acts, and the need for progress on all tracks of the peace process. The Council condemned in the strongest terms the recent acts of terrorism and urged the Parties to do their utmost both to forestall extremist actions and to deny success to extremists seeking by provocation to frustrate the peace process. Ministers also confirmed EU support for a significant political and economic EU contribution to the implementation of the Wye Memorandum.

On Kosovo, the Council reiterated its expectation that all parties, the FRY security forces and the armed Kosovo Albanian groups, comply fully with recent UN Security Council Resolutions. It repeated its support for the Kosovo Verification Mission, which should be fully operational as soon as possible, and underlined the need for an early start to political negotiations, with the EU's active involvement. It also condemned the action taken by the FRY authorities to prevent the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Louise Arbour, and her team from fulfilling their mission in Kosovo, as well as their recent crackdown on the independent media.

The Council emphasised the EU's continued commitment to support Albania. It welcomed the successful holding of the International Conference in Tirana on 30 October. The Council repeated the call in the EU's recent declaration to the Democratic Party to participate in the 22 November referendum on the constitution. It welcomed the WEU recommendations on assistance to ensure a viable police force in Albania and confirmed the Union's intention to reinforce its contribution to the re-establishment of such a force.

The Council reviewed the continuing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and its implications for the stability of the Great Lakes region. It agreed that the immediate priorities were the cessation of hostilities; the withdrawal of foreign troops; and all-party negotiations aimed at achieving a political settlement as soon as possible. It stressed the need to respect human rights and humanitarian law. It instructed officials to recommend how the EU could help further, in particular to stem the trafficking in small arms in the region.

At the UK's request, Ministers discussed the situation in Iraq and agreed a declaration emphasising support for UNSCR 1205 and condemning as totally unacceptable Iraq's decision to cease co-operation with UNSCOM.

The Presidency reported on the meeting of EU Defence Ministers on 3–4 November.

Taskforce 2000

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60211]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 18 November 1998]*: We are committed to having all its business-critical IT systems year 2000 compliant before the millennium. The report that the FCO will have only "minimal functionality" for some period around the turn of the century is false.

The FCO had long planned to replace its numerous and outdated office automation systems by year 2000 compliant systems. It still aims to replace as many as possible before the year 2000. In addition, as a contingency measure, the FCO has completed work to make its existing main strategic office automation system year 2000 compliant and will have replacements or acceptable workarounds in place for all other business-critical systems. The FCO's Internal Audit Departments has now begun an audit of the millennium programme.

The FCO's Global Telecommunications PFI contract is still under negotiation. But the FCO has signed an 'Instruction to Proceed' to enable replacement of non-compliant telephone switches to proceed while negotiations continue.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's latest quarterly return will be placed in the Libraries of the House and published on the Internet.

VIP Facilities, Heathrow

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to review the procedure for booking VIP facilities for former heads of state and Government at Heathrow. [60428]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The procedure for booking VIP facilities at Heathrow Airport are assessed from time to time, and will be reviewed again in due course.

Senator Pinochet

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of VIP facilities at Heathrow for Senator Pinochet's visits to the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998. [60427]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The costs were as follows:

(a) 1997

Arrival at Gatwick on 29 September: £188.00

Department from Heathrow on 5 October: £160.98

Arrival at Gatwick on 17 October: £160.98

Department from Gatwick on 21 October: £188.00

(b) 1998

Arrival at Heathrow on 22 September: £160.98.

Al-Shifa Factory, Sudan

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he had with the Prime Minister about the Al-Shifa factory in Sudan *(a)* prior to the bombing mission on 20 August and *(b)* prior to the Prime Minister's appearance on television on 20 August. [60408]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was in France on 20 August and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was in Scotland. They were in contact through their officials. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did not appear on television on 20 August.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was informed of the plans to bomb the Al-Shifa factory on 20 August; and by whom. [60409]

Mr. Fatchett: The US Administration informed Her Majesty's Government of their intention to launch an attack shortly before the attack took place.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions on which the British Ambassador to the Sudan visited the Al-Shifa factory. [60410]

Mr. Fatchett: The British Ambassador to the Sudan has visited the Al-Shifa factory once, on the occasion of the official opening in July 1997.

Indonesia

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the current human rights situation in Indonesia. [60473]

Mr. Fatchett: While welcoming a number of positive developments since May (the release of many political prisoners, trade union reform and a greater freedom of expression), we remain concerned about the overall human rights situation in Indonesia, particularly in the light of recent events. We regret the loss of life and the injuries that resulted from the use of force against demonstrators. We have urged the authorities to show restraint. We are encouraged by the steps towards democratic reform taken at last week's session at the People's Consultative Assembly, including the commitment to hold early elections in May or June next year.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent student demonstrations in Indonesia. [60497]

Mr. Fatchett: We regret the loss of life and injuries resulting from the use of force against demonstrators in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia. We have urged the authorities to show restraint.

Organisation of African Unity

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the meeting of the Organisation of African Unity in Burkina Faso concerning the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. [60476]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: At the meeting on 7–8 November in Ouagadougo, a committee of the Organisation of African Unity presented to Ethiopia and Eritrea a set of proposals for the peaceful resolution of the border demarcation dispute that exists between them.

We have made clear to the OAU and to both parties that Britain, together with EU partners, fully supports the OAU mediation efforts. We hope the OAU proposals may form the basis for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We welcome Ethiopia's formal acceptance of them, and look to Eritrea to indicate similar acceptance.

Sri Lanka

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on human rights in Sri Lanka. [60540]

Mr. Fatchett: We want to see an end to human rights violations by all sides in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Government have taken some positive steps to improve their human rights record. We will continue to press them to make further improvements as I did when I visited Sri Lanka on 10 November.

East Timor

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to mobilise international opinion against the actions of the Indonesian Government in East Timor; and if he will make a statement. [60399]

Mr. Fatchett: We support the United Nations efforts to seek a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the East Timor issue. We remain in close touch with the UN Secretariat, the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia and other partners.

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the UK's arms embargo on Nigeria. [60835]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We will continue to implement rigorously the EU arms embargo against Nigeria. The UK interprets this as covering all goods and technology on the UK Military List which forms Part III to Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods Order 1994, as amended.

Following consultations with this Department and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved, as an exception, a licence for the export of three military listed protected vehicles for use by the Central Bank of Nigeria for the escort of currency. This licence is being granted to permit a civilian end user to meet legitimate security needs and is consistent with the purpose of the embargo.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the EU has reacted to the changed political circumstances in Nigeria. [60839]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: In recognition of the progress being made towards respect for human rights and the restoration of a democratic civilian Government in Nigeria, on 1 November the EU adopted a new Common Position, replacing the Common Positions of 20 November 1995 and 4 December 1995. The UK was at the forefront of those advocating this change of policy. As a result the following measures have now been lifted:

- all visa restrictions;
- the ban on high level visits;
- the ban on sporting contacts;
- the ban on the appointment of European military personnel to diplomatic missions in Nigeria and Nigerian military personnel in the European Union.

The following measures continue to apply:

- suspension of military co-operation;
- cancellation of training courses for all Nigerian military personnel, except for non-combative courses to encourage respect for human rights and to prepare the military for the democratic control by a civilian Government of the armed forces;
- an embargo on arms, munitions and military equipment.
- A dialogue on development co-operation may now be resumed with a view to re-engagement after the installation of a democratically elected civilian Government.

The European Union also re-affirmed its willingness to strengthen a constructive dialogue with Nigeria and to support the electoral process. It also re-iterated its support for Nigeria's regional peacekeeping activities.

The new Common Position will be reviewed no later than 1 June 1999. Should there be any deterioration in the respect for human rights or the democratic processes, the Council will immediately review the Common Position with a view to adopting additional measures.

A copy of the new Common Position on Nigeria has been placed in the library of both Houses.

European Information Association

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement with the European Information Association. [60640]

Ms Quin: The FCO is aware of the activities of the European Information Association and subscribes to its publications.

EU Information Projects (Funding)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a breakdown of the current expenditure in the United Kingdom under EU budget lines (i) B3–300 and (ii) B3–301. [60641]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), the then Minister of State with responsibility for Europe, to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) on 3 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 597. It explained that budget lines

B3–300 and B3–301 of the EC budget, which fund information activity within the EU, are not broken down by Member State.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions have been given to Her Majesty's Ambassador in Chile concerning the current position of General Pinochet. [60467]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Ambassador has been asked to make clear to the Chilean Government that the question of Senator Pinochet's immunity is for the courts and not for the Government.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the education facilities available to Greek Cypriot children who live in the Rizokarpaso area in occupied northern Cyprus; and if, when the British High Commissioner for Cyprus or one of his officials last visited this area, they visited the Greek Cypriot schools in the area; [60703]

(2) when the British High Commissioner to Cyprus, or one of his officials last visited the Rizokarpaso area in occupied northern Cyprus; and what report he has submitted on the findings of the visit. [60704]

Ms Quin: There is one functioning Greek Cypriot primary school in Rizokarpaso. This school serves Greek Cypriot children from all the villages in the area. There are no facilities for secondary education for Greek Cypriot children in the Karpas. These children have to come to the south of the island to complete their education. Officials from the British High Commission in Nicosia make regular visits to the area. The last such visit on 20 October included a visit to the school and discussions with the teachers, children and parents. We continue to urge the Turkish Cypriot authorities to co-operate with UNFICYP in respect of their humanitarian mandate towards Greek Cypriots and Maronites in the northern part of the island.

Kosovo

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in bringing to an end acts of repression against civilians by Serbian security forces in Kosovo; and what progress has been made in securing a political dialogue between the two sides. [59443]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As a result of sustained NATO pressure, there were significant withdrawals from Kosovo of army and police units which had been responsible for repression in late October. The situation on the ground is now generally quiet, if tense, with sporadic acts of violence and provocation from both sides. Displaced persons have begun to return home. We continue to monitor the situation closely. The deployment of the first contingent of 50 British personnel to verify compliance with UNSCRs 1199 and 1203 was completed on 12 November.

Contact Group Experts met on 11 November to consider progress on the political track. The Contact Group endorsed US Envoy Ambassador Hill's plans to return to the region with EU Envoy Petritsch to press ahead rapidly with the negotiation process. Indirect negotiations are continuing and we support the efforts of US Envoy Hill to secure both sides agreement to an interim political settlement in the next few weeks.

Commonwealth Institute

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what progress has been made on the new constitutional basis and financial support system for the Commonwealth Institute; and if he will make a statement; [60689]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with the Commonwealth Institute on the future of the institute; and if he will make a statement. [60690]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: There are frequent consultations between Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials and senior management of the Commonwealth Institute, primarily about the Institute's strategic direction and the funding it needs to achieve its goals. We are currently considering a proposal from the Institute, which, if agreed, would enable the Institute, while remaining a charity, to become a company limited by guarantee. If agreement can be reached with the Institute, on both the new constitution and the level of funding necessary to secure the Institute's future, the proposed change in the constitutional relationship would be laid before both Houses of Parliament.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60368]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Six New Deal applicants have been selected to work in the FCO (subject to security clearance).

We are in touch with the Westminster Job Centre (and through them other Job Centres) in an on-going programme to identify future candidates. We hope to increase the FCO's intake of New Deal personnel next year.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60527]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Information on the numbers of people taken on under the New Deal by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

It is Government policy to encourage NDPBs to participate in the New Deal.

Pakistan

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning religious persecution in Pakistan; and if he will make a statement. [60710]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received representations expressing concern about religious minorities in Pakistan and its blasphemy laws. We share these concerns. I raised the issue of religious minorities with the Interior Minister during my visit to Pakistan last year, as did my noble Friend the Under-Secretary in January this year. As Presidency we led an EU démarche on the blasphemy laws on 14 May and participated in a further EU démarche on 19 October. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and raise our concerns with the Pakistan authorities.

Drug Gangs (Latin America)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many reports on the purchase of advanced military hardware by drug gangs in Latin America have been compiled by his Department since January 1997; and what is their current security classification. [60695]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: It is difficult for this Department to collate comprehensive data on these types of purchase, given the clandestine nature of the operations on the drugs cartels. We do actively monitor reports from a variety of sources in the capabilities of drug gangs to get as much information as we can. We have no reason to suppose that advanced military hardware manufactured in the UK has ended up in the hands of drug gangs.

Research Papers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each series of research papers which his Department currently produces. [60692]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office issues research papers in the following series:

Library and Records Department

History notes

Occasional papers

Information Department

Background briefs

Wilton Park

Occasional papers

Wilton Park papers.

A list of publications, some of which are available on the Internet, is included in the FCO's annual report. Research Analysts and Economic Advisers also produce internal series of note and memoranda.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Northern Spirit

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the performance of Northern Spirit in West Yorkshire in respect of cancelled and late services, short formations, and overall capacity; and what steps he plans to take to improve the franchising arrangements in West Yorkshire. [59657]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director and I have received 216 representations specifically about Northern Spirit's performance on the overall franchise since the General Election.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has said that the books are open for the renegotiation of franchise agreements, and he would consider any proposals to improve franchising arrangements. He will involve Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) where they are signatories to the franchise agreement.

Drivers (Drug Tests)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what results are available of the police pilot sweat/saliva tests of drug use among drivers in Strathclyde, Sussex, Cleveland and Lancashire. [60322]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I have him on 24 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *146*.

The trials undertaken by the police in March and April this year were for the purpose of assessing two examples of drug screening equipment for their practicality, robustness and suitability for general day-to-day police work, and not to detect drug use amongst drivers. The Department has discussed the outcome of the trials with the equipment suppliers.

Bridge Strengthening

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the cost is of strengthening the Avonmouth Bridge to comply with EC loading standards; what the total cost is of bridge strengthening work in the United Kingdom in order to comply with the EC directive allowing 40 tonne lorries; and how much of this cost has been met from public funds. [60267]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The current expected cost of the strengthening of the M5 Avonmouth Bridge is about £88 million.

A total cost for bridge strengthening work in the UK is not available, but in England, the total funds available to local authorities for bridge maintenance assessment and strengthening on their roads between 1 April 1992 and 31 March 1998 was £915 million. This figure does not distinguish between strengthening and maintenance needed to carry 40 tonne vehicles or 11.5 tonne axles and that needed to restore bridges' capacity to carry present vehicle traffic.

In Wales it is for individual local authorities to determine the level of resources to allocate to their assessment and strengthening programmes from annual settlements which are not attributed to particular services.

On all other roads in the UK, the costs of strengthening bridges owned by highway authorities is estimated to be some £700 million.

All the above costs are met from public funds.

Road Hauliers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to

the oral Statement by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury of 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 349, on taxation of road hauliers, if he will list examples of continental hauliers who have chosen to register their truck in the UK; and how many foreign-owned trucks have been registered in the UK by continental hauliers. [59885]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is not held by my Department. As my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary stated on 11 November 1998, there has been a report in the trade press of French hauliers registering their businesses in the UK to take advantage of lower business costs.

London Underground

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made on his proposals for a public/private partnership for the management and operation of London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [60323]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Transport has completed a market sounding exercise to get the views of potential bidders and much has been done to take forward the detail needed to implement the public/private partnership policy announced in March. London Transport and the Government are drawing together the results of the consultation with potential bidders, and finalising the detailed structure of the public/private partnership.

Water Budget Payment Units

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many homes in each UK region have water budget payment units; and if he will make a statement. [59913]

Mr. Meale: The Government welcomed the High Court ruling earlier this year that budget payment units with a closure valve which could cut off the flow of water were unlawful. The fifteen water undertakers in England and Wales who had previously installed budget payment units are complying with the court ruling by removing either the closure valves or the complete units. The information in the table, collected by the Office of Water Services for each company's area, shows the progress made as at 30 September 1998 and the number of units remaining to be dealt with. Information on the use of budget payment units is not available by region.

The Office of Water Services is pressing companies to act rapidly and is monitoring each company's progress in complying with the court ruling. The bulk of the units still with a closure valve are in Wales and OFWAT has told Welsh Water that it must comply or enforcement action will be taken.

Company	*Number of BPUs in place, 31 January 1998*	*Number of BPUs in place and still capable of disconnecting, 30 September 1998*	*Number of BPUs in place without valve, 30 September 1998*
Anglian	575	0	575
Bournemouth and West Hants	348	104	200
Cambridge	443	159	247
Welsh Water	28,144	[1]25,169	672
Mid Kent	1,739	112	1,435
North Surrey	17	0	17
North West	1,310	24	1,042
Servern Trent	1,612	162	397
South East	109	0	0
South Staffordshire	7	0	0
South West	463	1	427
Southern	87	4	0
Three Valleys	20	1	3
Wessex	2,995	988	1,730
Yorkshire	29	0	0

[1] Of these, the company have converted 1,011 to a reduced flow valve.

Private Hire and Taxi Licences

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the operation of the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 relating to the revoking and reinstatement of private hire or taxi drivers' operating licences by local authorities in cases of conviction for dishonesty, indecency or violence. [60324]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Exercise of the powers concerned is a matter for local authorities. It is they who are best placed to reach a decision, in the light of the circumstances of each particular case. The Act gives drivers a right of appeal to the local magistrates' court. I have at present no plans for a review.

Rail Ticket Prices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the regulation of long-distance rail saver tickets by OPRAF. [60363]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Saver fares are protected by the Franchising Director. The current controls are a consequence of legally binding franchise agreements inherited from the previous Government.

Through Ticketing

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidelines he has issued to the Rail Regulator on the matter of through ticketing arrangements. [60361]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. This is a matter for the Rail Regulator, who requires all train operators to offer through ticketing for all rail journeys.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the continuation of through rail ticketing arrangements. [60360]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have received no representations about the continuation of through ticketing arrangements for rail journeys. The Rail Regulator requires all train operators to offer through ticketing for all rail journeys.

Packaging Waste Regulations 1997

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received relating to the impact of the Packaging Waste Regulations 1997. [60489]

Mr. Meacher: A total number of the 356 responses were received to the consultation document we published on 30 July. Of the responses, 66 were from Trade Associations, 141 were individual businesses and 66 from local authorities. Comments were made on a wide range of issues regarding the Packaging Waste Regulations, all of which are being considered and will be taken into account in formulating proposals which we hope to announce shortly.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the operation of the Packaging Waste Regulations 1997 and correct market distortions produced by the malfunctioning of the PRN system. [60487]

Mr. Meacher: We published a consultation paper on 30 July this year. The paper proposed a number of amendments to the Regulations and further developments to the non-statutory approach to the Packaging Waste Recovery Note (PRN) system. We are presently considering the 356 responses to the document and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Teesside International Nature Reserve

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the arrangements made at the demise of the Teesside Development Corporation for the future of the Teesside International Nature Reserve; [60541]

(2) if he will list the owners of land allocated for the Nature Reserve following the demise of Teesside Development Corporation. [60502]

Mr. Meale: Prior to its wind up, the Teesside Development Corporation entered into contractual arrangements whereby its leasehold interest in the land would be assigned to the Teesside Environmental Trust Limited, subject to the consent of ICI as the freeholders; its freehold interest would similarly be transferred to the Trust; two landfill operators would commit landfill tax credits to the nature reserve; and one of the landfill operators would have the right to extract clay, thereby creating water features, in return for which the operator would pay royalties to the Trust.

Upon the Development Corporation's wind up at the end of March, its freehold and leasehold interests in the land were transferred to the Commission for the New Towns. The Commission still holds these interests, with ICI owning the freehold of the land leased by the Commission.

Commission for the New Towns

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the office accommodation formerly rented by the Teesside Development Corporation which has been passed on to the Commission for the New Towns. [60503]

Mr. Meale: The Commission for the New Towns inherited the Teesside Development Corporation's freehold interest in Dunedin House, with a commitment to take a lease of the third floor thereof when the freehold is disposed. The Commission also inherited the Development Corporation's leasehold interest in office space at Tees house and Stephenson House.

National Air Traffic Services

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the forecast expenditure by National Air Traffic Services over the next 10 years as a percentage of his Department's budget. [59952]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 15 November 1998]:* The figures for National Air Traffic Services' forecast capital expenditure over the next 10 years are as follows:

£ million

Year	*NATS capital expenditure*
1999–2000	51.2
2000–01	91.2
2001–02	122.9
2002–03	104.3
2003–04	75.7
2004–05	47.9
2005–06	37.0
2006–07	40.0
2007–08	38.4

This expenditure is funded through NATS' operating surplus, contributions by the Ministry of Defence, and from borrowing from the National Loans Fund which counts against the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement. The above figures exclude spending on projects which will go forward under the Public Finance Initiative and spending to date on the New En Route Centre at Swanwick, due to become operational during the period in question.

Figures for DETR budgeted expenditure are available for the next 3 years only, and are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1999–2000	9,729
2000–01	10,582
2001–02	12,000

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60378]

Mr. Meale: None as yet. Within my Department 11 posts have so far been identified as suitable for people under the New Deal programme. We aim to fill as many of these posts as possible through the programme, subject to suitable candidates being found.

Latex Allergy

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* training is given to Health and Safety Executive inspectors on the issue of latex allergy; and how many enforcement actions have been taken by the Health and Safety Executive against NHS trusts over failures to implement legislation in relation to latex allergy in each of the past 10 years. [60576]

Mr. Meale: Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors enforce occupational health and safety law including the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 (COSHH). These regulations deal with, amongst other things, latex allergy. Latex allergy is included in one of HSE's Field Operations Directorate's key national objectives for health services. The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) and HSE produce a wide range of COSHH guidance material, some of which deals specifically with latex allergy. The Medical Devices Agency of the Department of Health have also produced guidance on latex allergy, in consultation with HSE. Further detailed guidance by HSE to inspectors on latex allergy is in preparation and will be issued next week.

All HSE inspectors receive training in COSHH and the related Approved Codes of Practice. These relate to latex allergy. As part of HSE's recent Good Health aids Good Business Campaign a number of internal training initiatives were held for inspectors which included such issues as occupational asthma and dermatitis.

Since the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and the establishment of NHS trusts the following enforcement action under COSHH has been taken:

Year	*Improvement notices*	*Prohibition notices*	*Informations laid*
1990–91	43	2	1
1991–92	57	0	0
1992–93	78	0	1
1993–94	55	4	3
1994–95	54	3	1
1995–96	38	4	0
1996–97	45	3	0
1997–98 (provisional)	25	2	0

Enforcement data related specifically to latex are not maintained.

Animal Deaths (Railways)

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate how many domestic animals were killed or injured on railway tracks in England and Wales in each of the last five years. [60501]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate does not record this information. Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR 95) these types of incidents are reportable to the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate only if damage is caused to the train necessitating immediate temporary or permanent repair.

Section 14 Notices

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many section 14 notices he has placed on planning applications in inner London boroughs during the last 12 weeks indicating the *(a)* dates, *(b)* applications and *(c)* boroughs concerned in each case. [60509]

Mr. Caborn: Five such article 14 directions have been given.

Date	*Application*	*London borough*
10 September	St. Paul's Hospital, Endell Street, WC2	Camden
30 September	Battersea Bus Garage/Albion Wharf, Hester Road, SW11	Wandsworth
12 November	Friends Provident Site, Brewhouse Street, SW15	Wandsworth
12 November	Tooting Bec Hospital (Phase 2), Tooting Bec Road/Church Lane SW17	Wandsworth
10 November	Gargoyle Wharf, York Road, SW18	Wandsworth

Local Government

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the local authorities that have *(a)* formally notified his Department of their intention to change to and *(b)* have changed to a cabinet system of local government decision-making. [60589]

Mr. Raynsford: We are aware that a number of councils are already seeking to streamline their decision-making arrangements, with the adoption of cabinet type structures. However, under the current legislative framework it is not open to councils to adopt the full cabinet model, with individual councillors having executive responsibility, as proposed in the White Paper "Modern Local Government—In touch with the People" (Cm 4014).

Official Visits (Dorneywood)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the dates since 1 May 1997 on which he made official visits to Dorneywood, indicating in each case the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* dates of the visit and *(c)* individuals who accompanied him; and if he will make a statement. [60671]

Mr. Prescott: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 10 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *132*. I have used Dorneywood on a number of further occasions since then.

Bathing Water

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will announce the bathing water compliance results for 1998; and if he will make a statement. [60801]

Mr. Meacher: Overall UK compliance with the mandatory coliform bacteria standards in the Bathing Water Directive was 89 per cent. compared with 88 per cent. in 1997 and 90 per cent. in 1996.

I am pleased that this year more bathing waters in England met the mandatory coliform bacteria standards than ever before. I recognise the action taken by the Environment Agency and water companies in response to pressure from Government to achieve this. 90 per cent. of the identified coastal bathing waters passed, compared with 88 per cent. in 1997. But there are still too many bathing waters which fail regularly and compliance remains very poor in the north west, in particular, where only 62 per cent. achieved the standards. An overall failure rate of one in ten bathing waters is not good enough and I want to see significant improvements and our bathing waters to be regarded as among the best in Europe.

When I announced the results last year, I wrote to the Chairman of the Environment Agency asking for a detailed report on the prospects for compliance and the action needed on persistent failures. I also commented on the disappointing results in the north west and asked North West Water to work with the Agency to sort out the remaining problems in the region, particularly in the Blackpool, Fylde coast area.

The Agency has produced a comprehensive report and must build on their analysis and devise a well-targeted programme of action, with particular emphasis being given to persistent mandatory failures. By 2005, I want to see a further significant increase in bathing water quality, particularly in the level of compliance with higher, guideline standards.

Inland bathing waters are included for the first time and all 9 passed the mandatory coliform bacteria standards.

A record number of coastal bathing waters in England—349—met the Directive's coliform standards and of the 40 which failed, half of them missed compliance by only 1 of the 20 samples. Results in the north east were worse than in 1997 but in other regions percentage compliance was either better or the same as last year. I am pleased that Anglian region, again, achieved the mandatory coliform standards at all their bathing waters. Thames regional also achieved 100 per cent. and Southern region had only 2 failures compared with 8 last year.

More English coastal bathing waters (146) met the "guideline" standard needed for a *European Blue Flag* than in 1997 (136) and I hope that where those beaches achieve the appropriate beach management standards more local authorities will apply for this internationally recognised and valued award.

The main results for the UK are summarised in the table. This information, together with details for each bathing water in England, will be placed in the Libraries of the House today. Detailed results for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be published by the Departments concerned. A report with more detailed results for the UK will be available around the turn of the year.

Bathing water survey—1998 results for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
(Compliance with Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC): Coliform Standards)

	Pass	*(1997 result)*	*Fail*	*(1997 result)*	*Total*	*(1997 result)*
Coastal bathing waters						
Environment Agency—Operational Regions (England)						
Northumbrian[1]	26	(32)	8	(2)	34	(34)
Yorkshire[1]	21	(19)	1	(3)	22	(22)
Anglian	36	(35)	0	(0)	36	(35)
Thames	3	(3)	0	(0)	3	(3)
Southern	75	(67)	2	(8)	77	(75)
Wessex[1]	40	(39)	3	(4)	43	(43)
South West[1]	127	(125)	13	(12)	[2]140	(137)
North West	21	(17)	13	(17)	34	(34)
England	349	(337)	40	(46)	389	(383)
Wales	64	(60)	4	(4)	68	(64)
Scotland	12	(18)	11	(5)	23	(23)
Northern Ireland	15	(14)	1	(2)	16	(16)
Total coastal waters	440	(429)	56	(57)	496	(486)
Inland bathing waters						
Environment Agency—Operational Regions						
Thames	6	(—)	0	(—)	6	(—)
North West	3	(—)	0	(—)	3	(—)
Total inland waters	9	(—)	0	(—)	9	(—)

[1] Northumbrian and Yorkshire, South West and Wessex Regions were amalgamated in 1993, results are recorded separately here to enable comparison to be made with either years.
[2] One bathing water, Redgate, in the South West was closed during the 1998 bathing season and is therefore not included in compliance assessment for 1998.

London Government Headquarters

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish his Department's evaluation of the various bids for shortlisting for the prospective headquarters for London Government. [60782]

Mr. Raynsford: No. The information provided by the seven short-listed developers on which the evaluation was based was supplied on a commercially confidential basis.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what independent advice he sought on *(a)* value for money, *(b)* architectural merit and *(c)* social impact on neighbouring boroughs before making his decision on the shortlisting of prospective headquarters for London Government. [60781]

Mr. Raynsford: Turner & Townsend Project Management, Knight Frank and the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate (PACE) are advising on property related matters, including value for money and the availability of local amenities. A small design advisory group is advising me on the architectural merit of each proposal and the

London Boroughs of Camden and Southwark are working closely with the teams responsible for the two short-listed proposals.

Vehicle Licence Fraud

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) in how many cases of vehicle licence fraud prosecutions *(a)* fines and *(b)* the maximum fine were imposed in the last year for which figures are available; [60645]

(2) how many cases of vehicle licence fraud investigated by the DVLA proceeded to prosecutions in the last year for which figures are available; [60647]

(3) how many investigations were carried out into vehicle licence evasions (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage of the total number of licensed vehicles in the last year for which figures are available. [60646]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

London Airports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what planning assumptions the Government have made about the number and type of aircraft movements at the London airports in 15 years' time. [60644]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1997, my Department published "Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom", which look ahead to 2015 and include assumptions about the number of aircraft movements and average plane loads in the London airports system. Copies of this document are available in the House library. BAA and other London airport operators also prepare forecasts of this nature. The implications of these forecasts will be considered during the preparation of the UK airports policy announced in the "New Deal for Transport" White Paper.

Airports Policy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects his Department to issue the first consultation draft of the airports policy. [60643]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government are currently considering the precise scope and timing of the airports policy statement promised in their White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", and will announce their conclusions in due course. They will also consider what steps might be taken to develop thinking and focus the debate on the way forward including proposals for consultation.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that his Department's paper on an airport strategy will be published after the publication of the inspector's report on the Terminal 5 inquiry at Heathrow; and if he will make a statement. [60751]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In their White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", the Government said:

"We will prepare a UK airports policy looking some 30 years ahead. This will develop the application to UK airport of the policies set out in this White Paper—of sustainable development, integration with surface transport and contribution to regional growth. It will provide the framework within which those concerned can plan for the future with greater certainty. We will consult widely in preparing the new policy and will take account of the Inspector's report on the Heathrow Terminal 5 inquiry".

The Government are currently considering the precise scope and timing of the airports policy statement in their White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", and will announce their conclusions in due course.

London Underground Delays

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the causes of disruption and delays on London Underground in the past year, with particular reference to shortages of spare parts. [60743]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The figures for cause of delays, of 2 minutes and over, on London Underground during the year 1997–98 and in the 32 weeks of the year 1998–99 so far, are set out in the table under the categories London Transport record:

Cause	*Delays in 1997–98*	*Delays in 1998–99 (First 32 weeks only)*
Antisocial behaviour	5,645	3,172
Passenger ill/injured	676	462
Person on track	375	241
Unattended luggage	482	198
Terminus management	8,315	6,823
Driving technique	747	511
Possession overrun	114	92
Signals/point	2,827	1,371
Other track	907	473
Rolling stock	18,088	11,241
All other incidents	1,427	847
Total	39,603	25,431

LT do not separately log delays due to a shortage of spare parts. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Standards of Performance Scheme

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government's examination of the possibility of an extension of the standards of performance scheme will include consultation with *(a)* consumers', energy efficiency and environmental organisations and *(b)* the energy industry; and if he will place a copy of the accompanying paper in the Library. [60650]

Mr. Meale: As indicated in "UK Climate Change Programme—Consultation Paper", the Government are exploring with the energy industry and others the possibility of promoting energy efficiency through a new standards of performance scheme. Discussions will include consumers', energy efficiency and environmental organisations. I have placed in the Library a copy of the discussion note on the issues circulated to the industry and others.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the dates of meetings over the last year, which he has held

about genetically modified organisms with *(a)* companies, indicating the name of the company in each case, *(b)* environmental non-Governmental organisations and *(c)* English Nature. [60603]

Mr. Meale: I refer to the answer given by the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member of Wallesey (Angela Eagle), on 20 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *369*. Since that date, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has had no meetings to discuss genetically modified organisms. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has had the following meetings:

	Date
(a)	
Monsanto	14 October
British Society of Plant Breeders (SCIMAC group)	5 November
(b)	
Green Alliance	2 June
RSPB	2 June
Nuffield Council on Bioethics	7 October
Genetics Forum	15 October
(c)	
English Nature	2 June

Genetically Modified Crops

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for a certification scheme to regulate the commercial release of genetically modified crops. [60602]

Mr. Meale: Commercial release of genetically modified crops is regulated under part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 (amended). Together these implement European Directive 90/220/EEC (Amended) on the Deliberate Release of Genetically Modified Organisms. Under this regulatory framework genetically modified crops cannot be released commercially without prior marketing consent within the European Community. Applications for marketing consent are underpinned by a detailed risk assessment of the genetically modified crop and its intended use.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to license commercial releases of genetically modified crops in 1999; which genetically modified crops will be released in that year; and what form the scientific evidence from the farm-scale trials will take. [60605]

Mr. Meale: The commercial release of genetically modified crops is licenced at European Community level under part C (marketing consent) of Directive 90/220/EEC. No decision has been made about which crops will be included in the farm-scale evaluations in 1999, but we expect that they will include Plant Genetic System's herbicide tolerant oilseed rape (European Community refs C/GB/94/M1/1 and C/GB/95/05–01 A and B). The specification and scientific details of the ecological monitoring of farm-scale plantings of GM crops are still in the early stage of development. An announcement will be made in due course.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking to ensure that local authorities are prepared in respect of the millennium bug. [60437]

Mr. Raynsford: We attach the highest importance to all councils being properly prepared to deal with the millennium bug. To pursue this we are working closely with the Local Government Association, the Local Government Management Board and the Audit Commission. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has, jointly with Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chairman of the Local Government Association, written twice this year to each council leader stressing the importance of their taking action. Council leaders have been asked specifically to sign Pledge 2000 and to nominate a senior member to take public responsibility for seeing that action on the Millennium Bug issue is driven forward throughout their local authority.

Waste Paper Sludge

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultation his Department proposes to hold on new controls for the disposal to landspreading of waste paper sludge; and if he will make a statement. [60675]

Mr. Meale: The landspreading of waste paper sludge is mostly carried out, as a waste recovery operation, under the terms of the exemption from waste management licensing in paragraph 7 of Schedule 3 to the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. We have given a commitment to review this exemption in the light of research carried out to develop further the criteria that determine in what circumstances the landspreading of waste benefits agriculture or results in ecological improvement. Copies of the research report on the "Investigation Of The Criteria For, And Guidance On, The Landspreading Of Industrial Waste" have been placed in the library of the House.

The present position is that the Environment Agency is considering the project's findings and aims to make its recommendations to us shortly. Following receipt and consideration of the Agency's recommendations we intend to carry out a public consultation exercise on the revision of the landspreading controls in the 1994 Regulations.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60528]

Mr. Meale: Non-departmental public bodies are encouraged to participate as an employer in New Deal. Information on the numbers of people taken under the New Deal by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

Rail Users Consultative Committees

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what

assessment he has made of the adequacy of the staffing and information technology available to the Rail Users Consultative Committees. [60809]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The responsibility for the Rail Users' Consultative Committees and the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee rests with the Office of the Rail Regulator.

Following a request from that Office, I have agreed that my officials should undertake a staff inspection of these Committees. Work on this began earlier this week.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *349*, if he will list the authors of the representations on the Environment Agency decisions on Sellafield, and if they were in favour of or opposed to the recommendations; and what representations he received in the two months prior to the release of the Environment Agency documents concerning the Sellafield mox plant or discharge authorisations. [60682]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Landfill Tax Credit

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of landfill tax credit as a means of supporting projects beneficial to the environment; and if he will review the entitlement of local authority schemes to benefit from the credit. [60698]

Mr. Meale: The Government welcome the strong support for the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme expressed by respondents to their review of the tax last year. The scheme is proving to be a success with £72 million contributed towards environmental bodies in the last financial year (1997–98).

My Department is presently fully involved in reviewing the scheme to consider whether it could further be improved and in particular whether it could be amended to bring recycling within its scope, for example to support Local Authority recycling. If any changes result from this review they will be announced in Spring 1999.

Great Western Train Services

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *306*, on the punctuality of Great Western train services, if he will provide a breakdown of the total punctuality and cancellation payments made by the company to date between the three categories identified in his answer. [60621]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under their incentive regime Great Western Trains pay approximately £125,000 per period up front as a benchmark figure. Depending on performance they then receive money back or pay OPRAF a further sum. The up front payments to the end of September amount to £765,753. They have paid a further £486,000 for cancellations and delays of over 20 minutes. It is not possible to provide a more detailed breakdown because of commercial confidentiality.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the benefits of a public-private partnership approach to reducing the number of mortgage repossessions. [60718]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government recognise that providing protection for home buyers experiencing difficulty with their mortgage payments is an area where closer co-operation between the Government and lenders and insurers could be fruitful. We are exploring with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Association of British Insurers their proposals for closer integration of an improved private sector safety net with the existing state support.

Oil Production Vessels

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review his policy in respect of health and safety measures on oil production vessels; and if he will make a statement. [60807]

Mr. Meale: Health and safety measures on all offshore oil and gas installations, including production vessels, in UK waters are kept under constant review by the Health and Safety Commission and its Executive. These installations are subject to a modern regime of goal-setting health and safety regulations introduced in response to Lord Cullen's recommendations following the Piper Alpha disaster in July 1988. In particular, no installation may operate in UK waters without a safety case which has been accepted by the Executive. The effectiveness of this regime is currently being evaluated. If as a result of this evaluation the Commission decides to make proposals for further health and safety measures offshore I will given them the most serious consideration.

Planning (Minerals)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps will be taken to integrate the planning of mineral requirements with the development of regional bodies. [60815]

Mr. Raynsford: The primary responsibility for mineral planning in England will remain with the county and unitary councils, which are the mineral planning authorities. But the extraction of minerals is already one of the topics covered in Regional Planning Guidance. This will continue under the new arrangements for the preparation of this guidance by the regional planning bodies, working with the Government Offices and regional stakeholders. We shall also be consulting next year on how the present arrangements for the sub-regional apportionment of the national guidelines on the provision of construction aggregates should be adapted to take account of the development of a stronger system of regional planning.

Sustainable Development

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish his proposals for a set of headline indicators of sustainable development. [60844]

Mr. Prescott: I will be publishing my proposals in a consultation paper, entitled 'Sustainability counts', on Monday 23 November 1998. Copies of this paper will be placed in the Library of the House. The indicators will cover economic, social and environmental issues, reflecting the broad objectives of sustainable development. I hope they will help people to understand what sustainable development means, and that they will be reported regularly on television, radio and in the newspapers.

Buenos Aires Conference

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Buenos Aires climate change conference. [60842]

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress made at the Buenos Aires climate change conference. [60845]

Mr. Prescott: We achieved very significant progress in Buenos Aires.

Decisions were needed at COP 4 to prepare for the future entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol and, to strengthen the implementation of the Convention itself. It was also crucial to maintain the political momentum of Kyoto and to send out a clear signal that Governments are serious about tackling the threat of climate change.

The Conference achieved those goals. After extended negotiations, in which the UK again played a major role, we were able to reach agreement on a number of key issues. The most important of these was adoption of a decision setting out a work programme to put in place rules for the operation of the "Kyoto mechanisms". These mechanisms—emissions trading, joint implementation and the clean development mechanism—will have an important role to play in support of domestic action to enable countries to meet their Kyoto targets. The decision agreed a two year deadline for completion of the work.

We also secured agreement on elements of a workplan and a target date for completion of important procedures and guidelines on other key issues—such as a comprehensive compliance regime, including the strengthening of systems for compiling and reporting national inventories of greenhouse gas emissions and for the review of countries' performance in meeting commitments.

We were also able to agree a package of measures to enhance the technological and financial assistance which we are committed to providing developing countries.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals were agreed to at the Buenos Aires conference on climate change to *(a)* monitor, *(b)* regulate and *(c)* enforce (i) reforestation programmes and (ii) carbon trading; and if he will make a statement. [60846]

Mr. Prescott: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my response in the Library.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55551]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 19 November 1998]:* This question could be answered in full only at disproportionate cost. Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those that applied under the previous Administration.

The volume of travel by RAF aircraft reflects our Presidency of the European Union. Between 2 May 1997 and 30 September 1998, Ministers in this Department have used RAF aircraft on the following occasions:

Date	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Numbers accompanying Minister*
3 May 1997	Kensington Palace	Privy Council meeting	3
23 July 1997	Manchester	Local Government Association first Annual Conference	[1]—
27 October 1997	Luxembourg/Copenhagen/Oslo	Pre UK Presidency Bilateral	4
20 November 1997	Villaconblay/Frankfurt/Stockholm	Pre UK Presidency Bilateral	3
24 November 1997	Lisbon/Madrid/Amsterdam/Vienna	Pre UK Presidency Bilateral	4
22 January 1998	Riga	Heads of Government meeting of the Baltic Sea States	2
23 March 1998	Brussels	Environment Council Meeting	2
29 June 1998	Brussels	Environment Council Meeting	5
16 August 1998	Omagh	Visit Omagh following bomb attack	3
22 August 1998	Omagh	Attend Omagh Memorial Service	3
26 September 1998	Blackpool	Switch on Illuminations	1

[1] Shared flight with Chancellor—accompanied by 4 DETR officials

The average cost to the Department of the flights taken to meet these trips for the 17 months between May 1997 and September 1998 is £3,063. .

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, travelled by a privately chartered aircraft to Calcutta on 11 September 1997 to represent the UK Government at the funeral of Mother Theresa. He was accompanied by 2 of his staff and a member of the Royal Family and her staff. There was no cost to the Department.

TREASURY

IMF and World Bank (Voting)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to encourage formal votes to be taken and the results published in *(a)* the IMF and *(b)* World bank. [57829]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* In common with the Executive Boards of other International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the Executive Boards of the IMF and World bank aim to operate by consensus, and formal votes are rare. My right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development, as Governors of the IMF and World bank respectively, have no plans to encourage formal votes to be taken. However, they have called upon all IFIs to adopt a presumption in favour of release of information, except where this might compromise confidentiality.

In their statement of 30 October, G7 Executive Directors of the IMF called on the IMF to provide that full written summaries on a broader range of Executive Board meetings were made available to the public by issuing Public Information Notices following a discussion of: an IMF program or program review in which there is a Letter of Intent (LOI), Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Policy Framework Paper (PFP); changes in general Fund policy; and Article IV consultations. They called for IMF policies to make provision for the timely release of LOIs, MOUs, or PFPs following Board consideration.

Social Security

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will account for the increase in forecast of social security contributions for 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 between Table B8 of the Financial Statement and Budget report 1998 and Table B9 of the pre-Budget report. [59098]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* As paragraph B1 of the Report said, national insurance contributions have been especially buoyant in the first half of the year. Higher than expected outturns in the first half of 1998–99 are assumed to carry forward into future years. The forecasts of social security contributions as a per cent. of GDP are little changed since the Budget, reflecting upward revisions to the projections of money GDP (see table B5 of the Pre-Budget Report and table B1 of the FSBR).

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on the forecast social security contributions in Table B9 of the pre-Budget report if the employee and employer national insurance contribution starting points were uprated each year in line with inflation. [59099]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 November 1998]:* The Pre-Budget Report projections for social security contributions assume that lower and upper earnings limits are uprated annually in line with inflation.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the problems which have arisen in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which his Department is responsible arising from millennium compliance; if he will make a statement on progress to date in tackling such problems; and what are the priority areas for remedial work. [60065]

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60212]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answers 17 and 18 November 1998]:* The Year 2000 problem is being addressed as the highest priority in all the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments.

Progress in these Departments is reported to Parliament on a quarterly basis. The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly to the House and copies of the latest quarterly returns will be placed in the Library of the House and published on the Internet.

[redacted]vations by organisations such as Taskforce 2000 are taken very seriously and are taken into account by management in assessing the work that still remains to be done and how it should be taken forward.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what allocations have been made to date from the Contingency Reserve in relation to the millennium computer problem in *(a)* Her Majesty's Treasury and *(b)* other departments; and if he will make a statement. [59947]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* No allocations have been made from the Reserve in relation to the costs of ensuring Year 2000 compliance for IT systems either in HM Treasury or elsewhere in Government. The millennium computer problem has long been anticipated and departments are expected to deal with it within existing resources.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned on the effects of different forms of variable vehicle excise duty; and when he will publish the results. [60151]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 November 1998]:* The options on reforming vehicle excise duty are set out in the consultation document published on 3 November, which will inform the next Budget.

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the measure announced in the G7 statement in respect of making countries borrowing from the IMF treat foreign and domestic debtors alike. [59442]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 November 1998]:* On 30 October 1998, IMF Executive Directors of the G7 issued a statement on the work programme for strengthening the architecture of the international monetary system. The G7 IMF Executive Directors' statement complemented the Declaration of G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors issued the same day. With the support of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, G7 IMF Executive Directors called for the policies on the use of IMF resources to include requirements that the borrower, in accordance with a schedule for action, adopt policies to provide a legal basis for non-discriminatory treatment in insolvency proceedings between domestic and foreign creditors and for debtors and other concerned persons.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government are taking to improve the transparency of IMF accounting practices. [56527]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 October 1998]:* The IMF's financial statements are prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and are certified as representing a true and fair view of the Fund's financial position by an external audit committee.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has encouraged the IMF to continue looking for ways to improve the format, readability and clarity of their financial data.

The IMF Executive Board recently decided to publish on a monthly basis, information on the IMF's financial resources and liquidity position. The latest copy of the table and explanatory note have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on *(a)* a revaluation and *(b)* the sale of the IMF's gold reserves. [56524]

Ms Hewitt: The UK Government support, and have been pressing for, the sale of a proportion of the IMF gold reserves to provide financing for the HIPC initiative. The UK will continue to press for gold sales in the IMF Executive Board. Gold sales require the approval of the Executive Board by a majority of 85 per cent., and we are therefore working closely with other members at the IMF to secure Board approval. We would expect gold to be sold on the basis of market prices, in line with the provisions set out in the IMF Articles of Agreement.

The IMF can use its gold only by selling it. Under the Second Amendment to the IMF Articles of Agreement, it cannot use gold in loans, leases or as collateral in transactions and operations. Revaluation of gold in the IMF accounts would not therefore provide any additional resources for IMF lending or financing.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the interest forgone on that part of the UK's reserves that are notionally allocated to the IMF. [56523]

Ms Hewitt: The latest estimate, made last year, is that the cost of IMF membership to the UK averages £38 million per annum. This primarily reflects the interest forgone on reserves.

Single European Currency

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a co-ordinated Government public information campaign about the implications of the introduction of the single European currency. [58915]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 November 1998]:* The Government's communication campaign on the euro is not a general public information campaign but is specifically targeted at ensuring that UK businesses, especially small and medium firms, are aware of the implications of the introduction of the single currency from 1 January 1999 and have the information they need to address the issues arising from this.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the public service agreements between departments and the Treasury; and if he will make a statement. [59424]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The Public Service Agreements will be published next month.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what external scrutiny of performance against public service agreements is planned; and if he will make a statement. [59425]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* The public service agreements will set out clear objectives and performance and efficiency targets for public services. Performance against these objectives and targets will be reported annually to Parliament and the public.

Privatisations

Ms Osborne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many previous privatisations have involved Government golden shares; and how many of these remain. [59958]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 18 November 1998]:* The Government have issued 51 golden shares in privatisations. Most of the temporary golden shares have since expired. The table shows the Government's remaining holdings of 20 golden shares in privatised companies.

UK Government's holdings of golden shares

Company	*Expires*
Cable & Wireless	Non time limited
Sealink Stena Line	Non time limited
British Aerospace	Non time limited
VSEL Consortium	Non time limited
BG plc.	Non time limited
Rolls Royce	Non time limited
BAA	Non time limited
National Grid Group	Non time limited

UK Government's holdings of golden shares

Company	*Expires*
National Power	Non time limited
PowerGen	Non time limited
Scottish Power	Non time limited
Scottish Hydro Electric	Non time limited
Northern Ireland Electricity	Non time limited
Belfast International Airport	Non time limited
British Energy	[1]Non time limited
Nuclear Electric	Non time limited
Scottish Nuclear	Non time limited
AEA Technology	30 September 1999
Rosyth Royal Dockyard	(On completion of nuclear works)
Devonport Royal Dockyard	(On completion of nuclear works)

[1] but may be redeemed after 30 September 2006

Smuggling (Petroleum Products)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* tonnage, *(b)* retail value, *(c)* excise duty content and *(d)* liability for VAT of (1) petroleum products and (2) diesel products subject to cross border smuggling into Northern Ireland for each year since 1995. [60435]

Ms Hewitt: No. HM Customs and Excise do not publish such information.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many vehicles have been impounded by HM Customs and Excise for alleged smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland; and what was the tonnage of fuel carried for each of the last three years. [60637]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1998 to date, 48 vehicles have been seized by Customs for alleged smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland. In addition 412,598 litres of fuel have been seized, with admission of smuggling of a further 24,195,569 litres.

The problem of petroleum smuggling into Northern Ireland has been evident only since late 1997 and indeed this is the reverse of the situation which existed a few years ago when people from the Republic of Ireland would travel to Northern Ireland to purchase cheaper fuel. There were no seizures of vehicles or fuel in years prior to 1998.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many successful prosecutions there have been in 1998 for smuggling petroleum products into Northern Ireland. [60436]

Ms Hewitt: There have been 2 successful prosecutions to date, with a further 10 cases with the Director of Public Prosecutions (Northern Ireland) awaiting trial. The successful prosecutions resulted in a fine of £3,500 and an 18 months suspended sentence. In addition, arrears of £500,000 of duty were recovered and costs of £25,000 awarded.

In 1998 to date, Customs have seized 48 vehicles and 412,598 litres of fuel, with admissions of smuggling a further 24,195,569 litres. A total of 25 people have been arrested and 6 cases have been the subject of compound penalties to a total of £59,300 and arrears of duty of £200,000. Wherever possible, cases are progressed with a view to criminal prosecution of the individuals involved.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many successful prosecutions there have been in each of the last three years for smuggling petroleum products into Northern Ireland. [60636]

Ms Hewitt: These have been two successful prosecutions in 1998 to date, with a further ten cases with a Director of Public Prosecutions (Northern Ireland) awaiting trial. The successful prosecutions resulted in a fine of £3,500 and an 18 months suspended sentence. In addition arrears of £500,000 of duty were recovered and costs of £25,000 awarded.

The problem of petroleum smuggling into Northern Ireland has been evident only since 1997 and indeed this is the reverse of situation which existed a few years ago when people from the Republic of Ireland would travel to Northern Ireland to purchase cheaper fuel. There were no prosecutions for smuggling of petroleum in years prior to 1998.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons his Ministers have declined to meet the President and officers of the Petrol Retailers Association to discuss petroleum smuggling in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [60639]

Dawn Primarolo: The Petrol Retailers have met with officials, and with Customs staff in Northern Ireland. Ministers have been fully briefed by officials and are aware of the representations that have been made.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to tackle cross-border smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [60638]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government and Customs are both aware of this problem and recognise that it is serious in revenue terms and, just as importantly, disadvantages legitimate traders. Customs are deploying resources and actively mounting investigations against those involved to counter the threat posed to the revenue and to the Northern Ireland business community.

Cross-border issues such as this are common throughout the European Union and are a powerful argument for the programme to harmonise further duty rates between Member States. One of the ways to achieve this is by increasing EU minimum rates and this Government continue to press for this.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings have taken place between Ministers or officials and their Irish counterparts to discuss the smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [60635]

Dawn Primarolo: No meetings have taken place between Ministers and their Irish counterparts to discuss the smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland. However, meetings have taken place between operational staff. Where inquiries have extended to the Republic of Ireland jurisdiction requests have been made by Customs under the Convention for Mutual Assistance between Member States of the EU to the Irish Customs Investigation Branch for discovery of documentation at premises of oils suppliers in the Republic of Ireland to support intended criminal proceedings in Northern Ireland.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer where a couple have opted that the working families tax credit is to be paid to a male earner, how a female parent with care will ensure that payment is transferred to her following the breakdown of the relationship; and if he will estimate the length of time such a transfer will take. [60511]

Dawn Primarolo: In the situation described, the remaining partner either would claim Working Families Tax Credit themselves or, if they were not working, could claim Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance. This will ensure that the support the remaining partner receives is appropriate to her personal circumstances, and the deserting partner's claim for WFTC is ended. How long this would take would depend on how quickly the remaining partner made the claim.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the proportion of those couples who will be entitled to the working families tax credit where the female partner is the principal earner. [60539]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that about 20 per cent. of couples entitled to the Working Families Tax Credit will have the female partner as the main earner, and that about 90 per cent. of lone parents entitled to the Working Families Tax Credits will be female.

Indonesia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total loans by *(a)* the IMF and *(b)* the World Bank to Indonesia have been in each year since 1995; what (i) environmental, (ii) human rights and (iii) economic conditions were applied; and what monitoring has taken place in respect of these conditions. [57515]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* Total loan disbursements from the IMF and World Bank to Indonesia since 1995 (US$ millions) are as follows:

	IMF	*World Bank*
1995	—	1,144
1996	—	959
1997	3,000	916
1998 (expected)	5,500	659

Note:

(a) (i) No environmental conditions are attached to IFM loans.
(ii) No human rights conditions are attached to IMF loans.
(iii) IMF financing to Indonesia has been conditioned on a programme of economic adjustment, involving a macroeconomic framework conducive to the return of economic and financial stability, a comprehensive strategy to restructure the financial sector, further trade and capital account liberalisation, and improvements in corporate structure and governance.
(b) (i) All World Bank projects and programmes take account of environmental guidelines issued by the World Bank and agreed by the Board. A copy of the guidelines has been placed in the House of Commons Library.
(ii) No human rights conditions are attached to World Bank loans.
(iii) Different conditions are applied to different projects and programmes; adjustment operations in countries affected by crisis typically focus on mitigating the effects on the poorest groups in society and on promoting structural reforms.

Conditions for both IMF and World Bank programmes are monitored carefully, and their fulfilment is a requirement for the release of subsequent loan tranches.

Malaysia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total loans by *(a)* the IMF and *(b)* the World Bank have been since 1995 to Malaysia; what (i) environmental, (ii) human rights and (iii) economic conditions were applied; and what monitoring has taken place in respect of these conditions. [57522]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 2 November 1998]:* Total loan disbursements by the IMF and World Bank to Malaysia since 1995 (US$ million) are as follows:

	IMF	*World Bank*
1995	—	128.9
1996	—	86.0
1997	—	69.1
1998 (expected)	—	339.9

(a) Malaysia has not had an IMF programme in the years since 1995, and so has not received any disbursements from the IMF.
(b) (i) All World Bank projects and programmes take account of environmental guidelines issued by the World Bank and agreed by the Board. A copy of the guidelines has been placed in the House of Commons library.
(ii) No human rights conditions are attached to World Bank loans.
(iii) Different conditions are applied to different projects and programmes; adjustment operations in countries affected by crisis typically focus on mitigating the effects on the poorest groups in society and on promoting structural reforms.

Conditions are monitored carefully, and their fulfilment is a requirement for the release of subsequent loan tranches.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the terms of reference of the second review by Sir Malcolm Bates of the Private Finance Initiative. [60686]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The terms of reference of the review to be conducted by Sir Malcolm Bates were set out in a Press Notice issued by the Treasury on 12 November 1998.

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing *(a)* the total value of private sector investment in the period covered by the comprehensive spending review, resulting from PFI projects and *(b)* the public spending commitments from 1999–2000 onwards resulting from PFI projects signed or expected to be signed by the end of the comprehensive spending review period. [60837]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The figures are set out in the tables.

Total capital investment by private sector

£ million

Sponsor Department	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Defence	340	300	220	220
Foreign Office and Overseas Development	20	30	0	0
Agriculture[1]	50	20	20	10
Trade and Industry[2,3]	30	50	20	10
Environment, Transport and the Regions	470	1,050	940	1,160
Education and Employment[4,5]	10	20	30	10
Home Office	70	270	280	190
Legal Departments	30	30	20	10
Culture, Media and Sport	10	20	10	0

Total capital investment by private sector

£ million

Sponsor Department	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Health	310	610	740	690
Social Security	90	260	170	20
Scotland	310	520	320	60
Wales	110	150	120	70
Northern Ireland	20	40	60	20
Chancellors Departments	30	50	30	20
Local Authorities[5]	300	600	600	600
Total	2,200	4,020	3,580	3,090

[1] Includes Forestry Commission

[2] In June 1998 the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the CTRL deal was being restructured. The figures above reflect the current most likely profile for private sector investment although the profile may change as result of on-going negotiations. A further announcement will be made to Parliament on the outcome of the current negotiations in due course.

[3] In addition substantial private sector investment is levered in through housing, urban generation and other programmes.

[4] Excludes PFI/PPP activity in education institutions classified to the private sector. The estimated total capital investment for major PFI/PPP projects for these institutions is expected to be £93m in 1998–99

[5] PFI in Local Authority schools is included in the Local Authorities line

Public Sector Spending Commitments

Year	*£ million*
1999–00	1,580
2000–01	2,030
2001–02	2,390
2002–03	2,780
2003–04	2,990
2004–05	3,240
2005–06	3,220
2006–07	3,200
2007–08	3,130
2008–09	3,010
2009–10	3,040
2010–11	3,090
2011–12	3,120
2012–13	3,020
2013–14	2,810
2014–15	2,770
2015–16	2,560
2016–17	2,560
2017–18	2,540
2018–19	2,110
2019–20	2,110
2020–21	2,080
2021–22	2,110
2022–23	2,030
2023–24	1,920
2024–25	1,860
2025–26	1,530
2026–27	1,400

European Central Bank

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost of meeting the United Kingdom's liability to pay up 5 per cent. of its shares in the subscribed capital of the European Central Bank. [60792]

Ms Hewitt: In accordance with Article 48 of the ESCB Statute and Paragraph 9c of Protocol No. 11 to the EC Treaty, and following the decision of the ECB General Council in September 1998, the Bank of England will pay up 36,777,250 euro to cover its share in the ECB's subscribed capital. This payment will be offset against the proceeds of the liquidation of the EMI.

UK Productivity Report

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total cost to public funds of the report on United Kingdom productivity which he commissioned from the consultants McKinsey and Company; what is the length of the main report submitted; and what is the cost per page. [60649]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Government did not commission the report. It was independently produced. There was no cost to the public purse of the report on productivity by McKinsey and Company.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Pond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list for April 1998 the number and proportion of (1) part-time manual, (2) part-time non-manual and (3) all part-time employees on adult rates earning less than (A) £3.51, (B) £4.79, (C) £6.38 and (D) £6.90 per hour excluding overtime for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* both sexes and for (i) each county and unitary authority in England, (ii) each unitary authority in Wales, (iii) each London borough, (iv) each unitary authority in Scotland, (v) Great Britain as a whole, (vi) England as a whole and (vii) each Government Office region; [60442]

(2) if he will list for April 1998 the number and proportion of (1) full-time manual, (2) full-time non-manual and (3) all full-time employees on adult rates earning less than (A) £3.51, (B) £4.79, (C) £6.38 and (D) £6.90 per hour excluding overtime for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* both sexes and for (i) each county and unitary authority in England, (ii) each unitary authority in Wales, (iii) each London borough, (iv) each unitary authority in Scotland, (v) Great Britain as a whole, (vi) England as a whole and (vii) each Government Office region. [60443]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Chris Pond, dated 19 November 1998:

As the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary questions on earnings information for a range of geographical areas.

The latest available information, from the New Earnings Survey (NES) April 1998, is contained in the attached tables. These tables are voluminous and copies of them are being placed in the Library of the House rather than reproduced in Hansard.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of people in the Don Valley constituency who have changed employment in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and what proportion of the total workforce they comprise. [60453]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Caroline Flint, dated 18 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on employment in the Don Valley constituency.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the ONS's major source of labour market data on individuals. It can provide information on whether people have changed jobs in the previous 12 months. However, no LFS data is available at constituency level, and no data below county level is available for such analyses. As with any sample survey estimates from the LFS are subject to sampling error and such analyses of data below county level would not produce reliable estimates. Unfortunately no other official source can provide the information requested either.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [58587]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Treasury Ministers have made use of non-scheduled special flights for travel to and from various official meetings. All arrangements for these flights are in line with the Ministerial Code and Cabinet Office guidance on travel by Ministers.

Independent Financial Advisers

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional costs that will be incurred by independent financial advisers consequent upon phase 2 of the Financial Service Review of Pensions. [60763]

Ms Hewitt: This is a matter for the Financial Services Authority.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will explain the phrase

"the context of room for manoeuvre"

used in paragraph A5 of the Pre-Budget Report. [60685]

Ms Hewitt: The phrase used in paragraph A5 is based on the Treasury paper "Delivering Economic Stability: Lessons from Macroeconomic Policy Experience" which was published alongside the Pre-Budget Report.

Dividends (Tax Credit)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the hon. Members and peers who have made representations to his Department on the ability of non-taxpaying individuals to reclaim the tax credit on dividends. [60684]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Euro (Cross-party Committee)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his proposed cross-party group of hon. Members to discuss euro preparations. [60687]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote to each Parliamentary Party on 10 November inviting nominations for representatives for the new Cross-Party Advisory Group on preparations for the euro. Given the importance of ensuring that UK business is prepared for the start of the euro next year, I hope that every Parliamentary Party will wish to be represented on the Group.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to write to the Treasury Spokesmen of Opposition Parties in the House in relation to his plans to establish a cross-party committee to consider preparations for the euro; and if he will make a statement. [60041]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote to the Treasury spokesmen of each Parliamentary Party on 10 November inviting nominations for representatives for the new Cross-Party Advisory Group on preparations for the euro. Given the importance of ensuring that UK business is prepared for the start of the euro next year, I hope that every Parliamentary Party will wish to be represented on the Group.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those organisations invited by the Standing Committee on Preparations for EMU to help to prepare an outline national changeover plan to the single currency. [60633]

Ms Hewitt: The following organisations were members of the eight working parties convened to help prepare an outline national changeover plan:

Age Concern England
Association of British Insurers
Association of Convenience Stores
Association for Payment Clearing Services
Bank of England
Bedfordshire County Council
Bradford and Bingley Building Society
British Bankers' Association
British Chambers of Commerce
British Retail Consortium
Building Societies Association
Cabinet Office
Centrica Plc.
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
Confederation of British Industry
Consumers' Association
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Council for Travel and Tourism
Department for Education and Employment
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Department of Health
Department of National Savings

Department of Social Security
Department of Trade and Industry
Empire Stores Group
Engineering Employers Federation
Federation of Private Business
Federation of Small Businesses
Financial Services Authority
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Freight Transport Association
Halifax Building Society Plc.
Home Office
HM Customs and Excise
Inland Revenue
Institute of Directors
John Lewis Partnership
Local Government Association
Midland Bank
National Federation of Retail Newsagents
NatWest Group
Northern Ireland Office
Norwich Union Plc.
PAL International
Petroleum Industry Association
Post Office Counters Ltd.
Royal Mint
Royal National Institute for the Blind
J. Sainsburys
Scottish Office
Securitas UK Ltd.
Selfridges Ltd.
Severn Trent Plc.
Treasury Solicitor
Welsh Office
Whitbread Restaurants
Wimpey International Ltd.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the consequences of Sweden's non-inclusion in Phase 3 of EMU for the precondition of two years membership of the ERM prior to any UK participation in EMU. [60004]

Ms Hewitt: The Government note that the Council Decision of 3 May avoided a mechanical approach, allowing for the exercise of judgment provided by the Treaty. The decision that Finland and Italy met the conditions to join the single currency, though neither country had been a member of the ERM for two years, demonstrates this exercise of judgment.

The Council Decision of 3 May, stated that Sweden did not fulfil the necessary conditions for adoption of the single currency for a number of reasons, including the incompatibility of national legislation with the requirements of the Treaty and the Statute of the ESCB.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if applicant members of the EU incapable of joining stage 3 of EMU on accession will be required to participate in an exchange rate mechanism. [59809]

Ms Hewitt: The current applicants to the EU are neither required to adopt the euro immediately on accession, nor required to join an exchange rate mechanism.

Monetary Policy Committee

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much each member of the Monetary Policy Committee is paid for their services. [59529]

Ms Hewitt: The pay of the Bank's Governor, Deputy Governors and Executive Directors are set out in the Bank of England Report and Accounts 1998. The pay of external MPC members is a matter for the Bank of England.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will enlarge the Monetary Policy Committee to include more people with industrial and manufacturing experience; [59527]

(2) if he will increase the number of members of the Monetary Policy Committee representing each region of the United Kingdom. [59861]

Ms Hewitt: In appointing the members of the MPC, the Chancellor follows the requirement of the Bank of England Act that he be

"satisfied that the person has knowledge or experience which is likely to be relevant to the Committee's functions".

Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the UK's total exposure in public expenditure terms to the ESAF programme. [56522]

Ms Hewitt: The UK has contributed £236.5 million to the ESAF programme. Our projected contribution by 2003 is £310 million.

Census

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he plans to make to the way the Government categorise people's ethnic origins in the next census. [60486]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's proposals for the 2001 Census, including the topics to be covered, and details of the question, relating to ethnicity will be published in a White Paper early next year.

Smuggling (Alcohol and Tobacco)

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his latest estimates of the revenue lost to the Exchequer through *(a)* smuggling and *(b)* cross-border shopping of (i) alcohol and (ii) tobacco. [60841]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise new estimates for revenue lost (excise duty and VAT) through cross-Channel smuggling in 1998 and cross-border shopping in 1997 are set out in the tables, together with their revised estimates for earlier years.

Table 1: Revenue lost through cross-Channel smuggling

£ million

Product type	1996	1997	1998
Beer	105	110	140
Wine	45	45	50
Spirits	50	25	30
Alcohol	200	180	220
Hand Rolling Tobacco	500	630	730
Cigarettes and other tobacco products	180	160	270
Tobacco	680	790	1,000
Total	875	970	1,220

Notes:
Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Components may not therefore sum to the totals shown.
The figures shown use Customs' assumption that between 70 per cent. and 80 per cent. of all alcohol purchased abroad substitutes for similar purchases in the UK.

Table 2: Revenue lost through cross-border shopping

£ million

Product type	1996	1997
Beer	45	50
Wine	100	140
Spirits	45	50
Tobacco Products	50	60
Total	235	305

Notes:
Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Components may not therefore sum to the totals shown.
The figures shown use Customs' assumption that between 70 per cent. and 80 per cent. of all alcohol purchased abroad substitutes for similar purchases in the UK.

In addition, Customs and Excise estimate that about £50 million per year is lost through smuggling of cigarettes from non-European Union countries by air passengers.

The above estimates exclude any amounts for revenue lost on alcoholic drinks and tobacco products smuggled in freight consignments. Customs and Excise have not published any estimates for the extent of these activities.

A report on Customs' estimates of cross-Channel smuggling and cross-border shopping has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Centenarians

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the current number of centenarians by county. [60495]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Michael Jack, dated 19 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for the current number of centenarians by county.

The ONS produces population estimates for local authority districts in England and Wales for all ages up to the age group 85 years and over. Therefore, the centenarians are included in this group and cannot be separately identified.

The attached table provides the mid-97 population estimates for those aged 85 years and over by county and Unitary Authority.

Estimated mid-year 1997 resident population, persons 85 and over

	Thousands
England and Wales	988.8
England	931.1
Darlington UA	2.0
Hartlepool UA	1.4
Middlesbrough UA	2.3
Redcar and Cleveland UA	2.0
Stockton-on-Tees UA	2.2
Durham County	8.2
Northumberland County	5.4
Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County	19.1
Former County of Cleveland	7.9
Former County of Durham	10.2
Cheshire County	16.1
Cumbria County	9.9
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	43.9
Lancashire County	29.1
Merseyside Metropolitan County	26.0
East Riding of Yorkshire UA	6.1
Kingston upon Hull, City of UA	4.7
North East Lincolnshire UA	2.9
North Lincolnshire UA	2.6
York UA	3.9
North Yorkshire County	13.1
South Yorkshire Metropolitan County	22.8
West Yorkshire Metropolitan County	37.3
Former County of Humberside	16.4
Former County of North Yorkshire	17.0
Derby UA	4.2
Leicester UA	5.2
Rutland UA	0.6
Derbyshire County	12.8
Leicestershire County	10.5
Lincolnshire County	12.4
Northamptonshire County	10.3
Nottinghamshire County	18.0
Former County of Derbyshire	17.0
Former County of Leicestershire	16.2
Stoke-on-Trent UA	4.2
Hereford and Worcester County	13.1
Shropshire County	7.6
Staffordshire County	12.6
Warwickshire County	8.4
West Midlands Metropolitan County	43.0
Former County of Staffordshire	16.8
Luton UA	2.2
Bedfordshire County	5.6
Cambridgeshire County	11.9
Essex County	30.1
Hertfordshire County	17.5
Norfolk County	18.5
Suffolk County	14.3
Former County of Bedfordshire	7.8
Greater London	121.1
Brighton and Hove UA	7.1
Isle of Wight UA	4.0
Milton Keynes UA	2.0
Portsmouth UA	4.0
Southampton UA	3.9
Berkshire County	11.2

Estimated mid-year 1997 resident population, persons 85 and over

	Thousands
Buckinghamshire County	7.7
East Sussex County	17.9
Hampshire County	22.4
Kent County	32.0
Oxfordshire County	10.5
Surrey County	23.1
West Sussex County	21.7
Former County of Buckinghamshire	9.7
Former County of East Sussex	25.0
Former County of Hampshire	30.3
Former County of Isle of Wight	4.0
Bath and North East Somerset UA	4.1
Bournemouth UA	6.2
Bristol, City of UA	7.8
North Somerset UA	4.9
Poole UA	3.8
South Gloucestershire UA	3.6
Swindon UA	2.4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	12.2
Devon County	29.7
Dorset County	11.7
Gloucestershire County	11.6
Somerset County	11.9
Wiltshire County	8.3
Former County of Avon	20.3
Former County of Dorset	21.7
Former County of Wiltshire	10.7
Wales	57.8
Isle of Anglesey UA	1.4
Gwynedd UA	3.0
Conwy UA	4.1
Denbighshire UA	2.7
Flintshire UA	2.3
Wrexham UA	2.3
Powys UA	2.9
Ceredigion UA	1.8
Pembrokeshire UA	2.0
Carmarthenshire UA	3.8
Swansea UA	4.6
Neath Port Talbot UA	2.7
Bridgend UA	2.4
The Vale of Glamorgan UA	2.0
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff, UA	3.8
Merthyr Tydfil UA	0.9
Caerphilly UA	2.4
Blaenau Gwent UA	1.3
Torfaen UA	1.4
Monmouthshire UA	1.9
Newport UA	2.3
Cardiff UA	5.7

Notes:

1. Figures are displayed for local authority boundaries as at 1 April 1997.
2. Figures may not add exactly because of rounding.

Source:

Population Estimates Unit, ONS

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Lead Poisoning

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths occurred through lead poisoning in each of the last 10 years. [60804]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 19 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on deaths from lead poisoning.

Between 1988 and 1997, there were no deaths certified as due to lead poisoning in England and Wales.

Car Imports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been received by his Department and from whom, on the cost to the Exchequer in lost revenue from the parallel import of motor vehicles from the Republic of Ireland to the UK; and what calculations he has made of their effect on the loss of revenue to the Exchequer. [60591]

Ms Hewitt: HM Treasury has received a representation from the British Independent Motor Trade Association concerning type approval of imported cars sold to UK customers, which also referred to VAT being paid in the Republic of Ireland rather than the UK.

No calculations have been made on the revenue effect of parallel imports of motor vehicles from Ireland.

Financial Services and Markets Bill

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the disciplinary provisions contained in the proposed Financial Services and Markets Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights, with particular reference to Article 6, in the form in which such Convention will be incorporated into the UK law under the Human Rights Act 1998. [60834]

Ms Hewitt: A draft of the proposed Financial Services and Markets Bill was published for consultation in July. The Government are now assessing a number of issues that have been raised in the responses which we have received.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been employed in his Department under the New Deal arrangements. [60369]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment with responsibility for lifelong learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie), on 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *755*.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60537]

Ms Hewitt: NDPBs are encouraged to participate as an employer in New Deal. Information on the numbers of people taken under the New Deal by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

Abortions

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of abortions in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham were funded by the NHS in the last three years for which figures are available. [60346]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 19 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on NHS-funded abortions.

The ONS routinely publishes abortion statistics by regions and health authorities (HA). The following table shows the percentage of abortions funded by the NHS for residents of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA.

Percentage of abortions funded by the NHS for residents of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA, 1995–97

Year	*Percentage*
1995	70
1996	68
1997[1]	64

[1] Provisional

Figures for 1995 and 1996 are published in the ONS Annual Reference Volumes: Abortion statistics series AB nos. 22, 23. Provisional figures for 1997 were published in the ONS Monitor Series AB 98/4 Legal abortions 1997: residents of regions and health authorities on 26 June 1998. These are available in the House of Commons library.

Earnings

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the movement was between 1 April 1975 and 1 April 1998 in *(a)* the index of average non-manual earnings and *(b)* the Retail Prices Index. [60507]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Margaret Ewing, dated 19 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the movement in the index of average non-manual earnings and the Retail Prices Index.

The ONS does not produce an index of non-manual earnings. Information on average earnings is available from the New Earnings Survey (NES). Regrettably, the NES cannot provide data on a consistent basis for non-manuals, due to changes in the definition of non-manuals and in the definition of adult rates of pay. Comparisons of non-manual adult earnings over the period should be treated with some caution.

The NES shows that the average gross weekly earnings for full-time non-manual employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence, was £56.30 and £425.20 at April 1975 and 1998 respectively, an increase of 655 per cent.

The percentage increase in all items retail prices index between 15th April 1975 and 21st April 1998, the relevant 'index days', was 397 per cent.

Lost Working Days (Drug Abuse)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the number of working days lost in each of the last three years as a consequence of drug abuse-related absences. [60424]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Tony Baldry, dated 19 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on working days lost as a consequence of drug-related absences.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the ONS's major source of labour market data on individuals. The LFS collects information on whether people had any time off in the reference week because of sickness or injury. However, no information on the cause or type of sickness is collected. Unfortunately, no other official source can provide the information requested either.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* advice and *(b)* instructions have been given by the Treasury to departments in relation to earmarking of reserves within existing departmental budgets; and if he will make a statement. [59439]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 November 1998]:* I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Dependent Children

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the percentage of families with dependent children which are *(a)* married couples *(b)* cohabiting couples and *(c)* lone parents, by each gender; [60766]

(2) if he will list the percentage of children who are in a household where the adult or adults with parental responsibility are *(a)* married, *(b)* co-habiting *(c)* single, *(d)* widowed, *(e)* divorced, *(f)* separated and *(g)* co-habiting with someone of the same sex; [60765]

(3) if he will list the percentage of households headed by a person who is *(a)* married, *(b)* co-habiting, *(c)* single, *(d)* widowed, *(e)* divorced, *(f)* separated and *(g)* co-habiting with someone of the same sex; [60768]

(4) if he will list the percentage of women with a child aged between five and nine years who *(a)* work (i) full-time and (ii) part-time, *(b)* are unemployed and *(c)* are economically inactive; [60770]

(5) if he will list the percentage of women with a pre-school child who *(a)* work (i) full-time and (ii) part-time, *(b)* are unemployed and *(c)* are economically inactive; [60767]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Edward Leigh, dated 19 November 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary questions (60765, 60766, 60767, 60768, 60769 and 60770) about the economic status of mothers with dependent children.

Tables attached show data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which is the ONS major source of labour market data on individuals.

The first table shows the latest available quarterly data for the United Kingdom. The second table gives the same analysis for Great Britain for the average of the period from spring 1996 to winter 1996/7 i.e. on a geography and time period consistent with the answers to your other three questions about demographic data.

In the General Household Survey (GHS), adults and children in each household are assigned to families: married couple families; cohabiting couple families and lone parent families. Children belong to the appropriate family either by virtue of being the natural children of both the parents forming the couple, or of the lone parent, or else, if they are adoptive or stepchildren, by belonging to the same family as their adoptive/step parents. Foster children, however are not regarded part of their foster parent family since they are not related to them. For the purpose of answering this question, it has been assumed that the natural/adoptive/step parent(s) are the adults responsible for the children. Attached are tables from the GHS give the information requested regarding households.

Economic status of mothers by age of youngest dependent child

Percentage

	Age of youngest dependent child		
	0 to 4	*5 to 9*	*10 to 15*
UK, summer 1998, not seasonally adjusted			
In employment:	50.2	66.0	73.9
Of which full-time	18.0	23.8	34.0
Of which part-time	32.2	42.2	39.8
ILO Unemployed	4.5	4.7	3.3
Inactive	45.3	29.3	22.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
GB, average spring 1996 to winter 1996/7			
In employment:	49.4	64.7	74.0
Of which full-time	16.7	21.5	33.2
Of which part-time	32.7	43.1	40.7
ILO Unemployed	4.8	5.4	3.6
Inactive	45.9	29.9	22.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Percentage of dependent children living in families within private households according to the de facto marital status of the head of family, 1996, Great Britain

De facto status of head of family	*Percentage*
Married couple	70
Cohabiting	7
Single (never married)	8
Widowed	1
Divorced	8
Separated	7

Source:
General Household Survey, ONS

Percentage of families with dependent children by marital status of head of family, 1996, Great Britain

Type of family with dependent children	*Percentage*
Married couple	70
Cohabiting couple	8
Lone mother	20
Lone father	2
Total	100

Source:
General Household Survey, ONS

Household heads by de facto marital status, 1996, Great Britain

Household head	*Percentage*
Married	54
Cohabiting	6
Single (never married)	13
Widowed	15
Divorced	8
Separated	3
Total	100

Source:
General Household Survey, ONS

SOCIAL SECURITY

LOFIT

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what meetings he or members of his ministerial team attended in October with the London Organised Fraud Investigation Team; [59701]

(2) what the reasons were for the closure of the London Organised Fraud Investigation Team's offices and the serving of summary notices; [59704]

(3) who will take responsibility for the cases which the London Organised Fraud Investigation Team was pursuing; and if the cases will be proceeded with; [59705]

(4) if his Department was involved in the decision to close the London Organised Fraud Investigation Team's offices. [59703]

Mr. Denham: The London Organised Fraud Investigation Team (LOFIT) was set up by the Association of London Government (ALG). It was a three year pilot, tasked to look at the best ways of tackling organised Housing Benefit fraud. The pilot began in March 1996 and was scheduled to end in March 1999. The Department provided support, including funding. The ALG were responsible for the management of LOFIT and established a management committee to carry out this function on which the DSS had only observer status.

Following a value for money report from the Audit Commission, DSS and the ALG commissioned an evaluation report on the effectiveness of LOFIT by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI). Having received the report we were in no doubt that continued funding of the pilot could not be justified. The ALG agreed and decided to wind down the operation of LOFIT as from 12 October 1998. We agreed to their request for assistance on the implementation of an orderly and properly managed rundown. It was further agreed that the DSS would maintain the relevant funding until such time as that was achieved, subject to a satisfactory closure plan, as well as to provide appropriate technical investigative advice on outstanding cases.

The ALG took immediate action and has since appointed an administrator to take responsibility for the management of this rundown, along with the disposal of cases which had been referred to LOFIT. The administrator will decide how the team's remaining cases should be handled.

Neither I nor any members of the ministerial team attended any meetings in October with LOFIT.

Tackling organised fraud is a demanding task. The Government are pursuing this within the anti-fraud strategy announced earlier this year in the Green Paper "BEATING FRAUD IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS: Securing the Future". We are continuing to look at ways to strengthen our fight against fraud including establishing better partnerships with local authorities.

NIRS2 Computer System

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to recover from the supplier the costs incurred by the public purse as a consequence of the Contributions Agency's computer system failure. [60750]

Mr. Timms: Compensation of £3.732 million has been paid in respect of changes to the original contract dates.

Work continues to assess the extent to which additional costs have or will be incurred. Consideration is also being given to the cause of any problems that may result in additional costs to the Department. Any future course of action will depend on the outcome of this work. We have not ruled out the possibility that compensation claims will in future be presented to the Supplier.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *396*, on problems with the NIRS2 computer system, if he will provide corresponding figures for the basic state pension. [60594]

Mr. Timms: The estimated total amount of basic State Pension being underpaid weekly because of problems with the NIRS2 computer is about £38,000. The total amount estimated to have been underpaid since April is about £510,000.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Contributions Agency's computer system will be fully functional. [60748]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the Written Answers I gave to the hon. Members for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1187*, and 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *499–500*.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements for compensation are being made for those affected by the failure of the Contributions Agency's computer system; and when and how they will be notified. [60749]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the Written Answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on 22 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1187*, and 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *603–06*.

All Work Test

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the benefits which a person with disabilities will be entitled to if under the new form of the all work test he agrees to make himself available for limited types and limited amounts of work; and to what extent payment of those benefits will be dependent on his taking any job which is suitable for his capabilities. [60725]

Mr. Timms: Reform of the All Work Test will focus on providing additional information about people's capacities which contribute to a wider assessment of employability by a Personal Adviser, to help plan a return to work where this is appropriate. More than a million disabled people say they would like to work and these reforms are intended to help them to realise that ambition.

The All Work Test will continue to assess incapacity in the same way as now, in order to determine entitlement to benefits (Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Income Support paid on the grounds of incapacity, and the disability premium in the income-related benefits). We have no plans to make receipt of these benefits conditional on a claimant's making himself available for work or accepting employment.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people who have been awarded incapacity benefit since April 1995 and who do not have income from an occupational or private pension also receive one or more of income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit; [60701]

(2) how many people who have been awarded incapacity benefit since April 1995 also receive one or more of income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit. [60700]

Mr. Timms: As at 31 May 1997 there were 664,000 Incapacity Benefit recipients in receipt of one or more of Income Support, Housing Benefit (HB) or Council Tax Benefit (CTB). Information is not available on the number of those whose benefit awards started after April 1995, or of those who do not have occupational or personal pensions.

Source:

1 per cent sample of the (HB/CTB) Housing Benefit Management Information System (which are rounded to nearest 10,000 and include estimates), and 5 per cent. sample of Income Support cases (rounded to nearest 1,000).

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his oral statement of 28 October 1998, *Official Report*, column 339, if he will indicate the levels of *(a)* health insurance and *(b)* pension income thresholds that would lead to dis-entitlement of payment of incapacity benefit. [60590]

Mr. Timms: Our proposal is to reduce Incapacity Benefit by 50 per cent. of income in excess of £50.00 a week from occupational or personal pensions, or permanent health insurance arranged by an employer. This will apply to new claims only; existing claimants will not be affected.

The point at which entitlement to payment of Incapacity Benefit is extinguished will depend on the level of benefit payable.

At current rates someone qualifying for the basic rate of long-term Incapacity Benefit (£64.70 a week) would need pension income or permanent health insurance of £179.40 to have no entitlement to Incapacity Benefit, and would still have nearly £115.00 more weekly income than someone whose only income is Incapacity Benefit.

Someone qualifying for an age addition of £6.80 and dependency increases for an adult (£38.70) and one child (£9.90) as well as the basic rate of long-term Incapacity Benefit (total £120.10 a week) would need pension income or permanent health insurance of £290.20 to have no entitlement to Incapacity Benefit, and would still have £170.00 more weekly income than someone whose only income is Incapacity Benefit.

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants for incapacity benefit have *(a)* been found fit to work following an examination by a BAMS doctor and *(b)* have had this decision overturned on (i) appeal and (ii) reviews. [60654]

Mr. Timms: Between April 1995 and 31 August 1998, 321,791 claims for Incapacity Benefit were disallowed following examination under the All Work Test.

Up to 31 August 1998, 49,951 of these decisions had been reversed by an appeal tribunal and 2,797 on review by the adjudication officer following an appeal by the claimant.

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants for incapacity benefit who are from ethnic minority backgrounds have been found fit for work following examination by a BAMS doctor. [60655]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60519]

Angela Eagle: This Department provides financial support to two non-departmental public bodies, the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA) and the Pensions Compensation Board (PCB). OPRA has not yet recruited anyone under the New Deal but hopes to participate in the near future. PCB does not directly employ any staff so there is no scope for them to recruit under the New Deal arrangements.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his estimate that lone parents who take paid employment as a result of the New Deal programme and who are £40 per week better off takes account of the value of those passported benefits which are available only to those on income support. [60513]

Angela Eagle: The "better off" figure quoted as £40 refers to the sample of around 300 lone parents who moved from Income Support into work (and onto Family Credit) following participation in the New Deal for Lone Parent prototypes. No statistics are collected on those who move off benefit completely. Included in the calculation of the £40 better off figure are Child Benefit, maintenance, Family Credit, net income from earnings, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Family Credit and Income Support recipients are entitled to several additional NHS benefits such as free prescriptions, dental treatment, sight tests, vouchers for glasses, refunds of travel costs to and from hospital for treatment, wigs and fabric supports, as well as dried milk for babies under a year old. Income Support recipients are also entitled to additional benefits, such as free school meals for children, which are not available to those on Family Credit. None of the value of these additional benefits is included in any of the above calculations.

Notes:

1. Earnings are not assumed in Income Support cases.

2. The better off figure takes account of assumed rates of Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit for Income Support cases (set at £54.10 and £8.60 respectively) and a calculated amount for each Family Credit case.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the total number of lone parents who obtained employment through the New Deal for Lone Parents between July 1997 and September 1998 have subsequently left employment to claim income support. [60702]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the average annual salary of the personal advisers in the New Deal for Lone Parents is; and what the ratio of advisers to lone parents has been in each of the pilot areas. [60744]

Angela Eagle: The average annual salary of the personal advisers in the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is £20,783 gross.

The table shows the estimated total numbers of lone parents on Income Support in each of the 'pilot' areas at the commencement of Phase 1 of the New Deal for Lone Parents in July 1997 whose youngest child was aged 5 years 3 months and over.

District	*Estimated number of lone parents on Income Support whose youngest child was aged 5 yrs 3 mths and over*	*Number of advisers*	*Estimated ratio of advisers to lone parents*
Cambridgeshire	4,780	11	1 to 434
Sheffield East	3,200	9	1 to 355
North Worcestershire	3,320	7	1 to 474
North Cheshire	4,330	10	1 to 433
North Surrey	6,720	15	1 to 448
Cardiff & Vale	5,020	11	1 to 456
Clyde Valley	2,710	6	1 to 451
Warwickshire	3,440	8	1 to 430
Total	33,520	77	1 to 435 (average)

Notes:

1. The numbers of Advisers shown gives the numbers in post at the commencement of Phase 1 of the New Deal for Lone Parents in July 1997. There were fluctuations in these figures due to staff changing jobs etc., but the number of Advisers throughout Phase 1 of the New Deal for Lone Parents ranged between 72 and 84.

2. It is important to note that the number of lone parents shown in each of the Districts is the number in the target group—ie. those whose youngest child is aged 5 years 3 months and over. This group represents one half of the total number of lone parents claiming Income Support in each of the areas shown. In addition, lone parents from the non-target group (ie. those whose youngest child was aged below 5 years and three months) also put themselves forward and actually benefited from the New Deal for Lone Parents service.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60374]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the Written Answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie), the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment with responsibility for lifelong learning, today, *Official Report*, column *755*.

This Department has not yet recruited any young people under the New Deal arrangements. The Benefits Agency and the War Pensions Agency have recently signed New Deal contracts with the Employment Service. The other Agencies, and DSS Headquarters, expect to sign contracts shortly. With these agreements in place, we hope to begin recruiting people under the New Deal arrangements.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who will receive means tested benefits as a result of the abolition of severe disablement allowance for adults. [60510]

Mr. Timms: Information on the additional number of men and women who will receive means tested benefits as a result of the reforms to Severe Disablement Allowance is not available. However, current statistical data indicate that nearly 70 per cent. of the 10,000 men and 6,000 women who will no longer be able to claim Severe Disablement Allowance will, as now, claim Income Support. Of the remaining 30 per cent., most will not qualify for Income Support due to the level of other income available to them and it is unlikely that they will do so in the future.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many adjudication officers are employed to assess *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance in disability benefit centres; and what arrangements are made in the event of adjudication officers being (i) sick and (ii) on leave; [60816]

(2) how many cases are outstanding because of a shortage of adjudication officers at disability benefit centres; [60817]

(3) what vacancies there are for adjudication officers at disability benefit centres. [60818]

Mr. Timms: I will write to the hon. Member.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the amount of money currently paid to post offices for handling payments of family credit; and if he will make a statement on the implications of the loss of such payments following the introduction of the working families tax credits. [60512]

Angela Eagle: The fees paid by this Department to the Post Office are commercial in confidence. However, we can assure the hon. Member that the relevant contracts are scripted to provide flexibility for both increases and decreases in volumes of business and therefore should not be a factor in the implementation of new policies.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *96*, on means-tested benefits, if he will estimate how many of those listed will be receiving, *(a)* income support alone, *(b)* income support and either housing benefit or council tax benefit alone, *(c)* working families tax credit alone, *(d)* housing benefit alone, *(e)* council tax benefit alone, *(f)* working families tax credit and either housing benefit or council tax benefit and *(g)* any other combinations of these benefits. [60593]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available was published in the "Cross Benefit Analysis—Population of Working Age on Key Benefits" on 29 October 1998. Copies of this document can be found in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to publish the housing benefit review. [60680]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on 18 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *621–22*.

Benefit Interviews

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances, under the single gateway to benefit, attendance at the interview with a special adviser will not be a condition of receiving benefit. [60699]

Angela Eagle: We recognise that for some people claiming benefit an immediate interview about work may not be appropriate. For them, the priority will be to pay the benefit to which they are entitled and ensure that all their welfare needs are properly identified. The gateway seeks to treat people as individuals and avoid rigid categorisation. Everyone will be handled with sensitivity, taking account of their particular needs. In some cases, the work-focused interview may have to be deferred.

Mortgage Protection

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last met the representatives of the mortgage protection insurance industry to discuss products to meet the needs of people to protect their homes; and with what results. [60717]

Angela Eagle: The Government are working in partnership with lenders and insurers to encourage greater provision outside the orbit of government to provide increased security for all home owners. As part of that ongoing process, Ministers from this Department and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions met representatives of the lending and insurance industries on 20 October, to discuss the industries' proposals for better protection for home owners, in particular the development of a new, standard mortgage payment insurance product.

Injury Compensation Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the rules under which compensation payments following personal injuries are offset against certain social security benefits. [60688]

Mr. Timms: None at present. We are monitoring carefully the reformed scheme that began in October last year.

Benefit Uprating

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the benefit rates and disregards which will not be uprated in line with the relevant price index in April 1999, stating the reason in each case. [59817]

Mr. Darling: *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* I will write to my hon. Friend.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the estimate by NatWest Life that 20 per cent. of those currently of working age can expect to be comfortable in old age; and if he will list the policies which he has to ensure that those who are currently unemployed will not require support from means-tested benefits in old age. [60664]

Mr. Denham: The estimate by NatWest Life forms part of one of the many surveys on retirement income that are produced from time to time by a wide variety of organisations. It is not the Government's policy to comment on the publication of such reports. The Pensions Review is currently looking at all aspects of the basic State Pension and second pensions. We intend to publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55556]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Task Force Schemes

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many voluntary sector and environmental task force schemes are operating in Scotland under the New Deal; where they are based; how many young people in each local authority area are involved in such schemes; and what percentage they are in each local authority area of all young people involved in the New Deal. [58981]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 11 November 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Scottish Parliament (Voting System)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to launch the programme of public education about the voting system for the elections to the Scottish Parliament; what form it will take; which non-party agency he will put in charge of it; and how much money is budgeted for this purpose. [60355]

Mr. McLeish: We envisage the planned voter education campaign commencing in the New Year. We are currently taking professional advice about the precise form and timing of the campaign and intend to discuss our proposals with the other political parties. We will make decisions on the budget to be assigned to the campaign in the light of those discussions and the professional advice we receive.

Tourism Grants

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total value of grants awarded in Scotland under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 in each year since April 1992. [60596]

Mr. Macdonald: The total value of assistance approved by the Scottish Tourist Board in the form of grants and loans was as follows:

£

Year	*Value of assistance*
1992–93	2,863,000
1993–94[1]	963,000

[1] The scheme of financial assistance operated by the Scottish Tourist Board under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 was suspended with effect from 29 June 1993.

Chicken Meat Imports

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the volume of chicken meat imported to Scotland from Thailand. [60406]

Mr. Macdonald: Information on the value of chicken imports to Scotland is not available.

Arable Crop Payments

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to speed up the payment to farmers of money owed by his Department in respect of arable crop payments. [60404]

Mr. Macdonald: Payments to Scottish farmers under the 1998 Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) started on 16 October, the earliest date allowed under EU legislation, and some two months earlier than in 1997. To date, some 80 per cent. of arable farmers in Scotland have received over £78 million under the 1998 scheme. The remainder will be paid once they have passed all the necessary validation checks.

Bacon

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from pig farmers about labelling of Scottish-produced bacon; and what action he is taking in respect of country of origin *(a)* labelling and *(b)* packing. [60405]

Mr. Macdonald: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Lord Sewel has met industry representatives, including pig farmers, on a number of occasions since the collapse in prices in the pig sector. Labelling home-produced bacon and pork was one of the issues discussed. There is no EU legislation governing the labelling of pigmeat. However, under the Food Safety Act 1990 it is an offence to describe a food falsely or make misleading descriptions as to the nature, substance or quality of the food. The information on the food label must also meet the labelling requirement in the Food Labelling (Scotland) Regulations 1984. Food must be labelled with particulars of its place of origin, if failure to give such particulars might mislead a purchaser as to the true origin of the food. The presence of this legislation allows home-produced bacon and pork to be identified to consumers at retail level. The Government are discussing with major retailers, wholesalers and caterers how best to ensure that the consumer can exercise choice.

Beef on the Bone

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the lifting of the ban on beef on the bone. [60407]

Mr. Macdonald: A number of farming and meat industry organisations have made such representations to me since the beef on the bone ban took effect last December. In addition, I have received 126 letters from Members of Parliament and private individuals on this issue.

Teachers' Salaries

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what salary was payable, in real terms to *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary teachers in Scotland at the (i) bottom and (ii) top of the basic scale in the year from (1) 1 April 1975, (2) 1 April 1980, (3) 1 April 1993 and (4) 1 April 1998. [60506]

Mrs. Liddell: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on by health authorities and health trusts under the New Deal arrangements. [60412]

Mr. Galbraith: On 16 September I announced that Trusts and Health Boards in Scotland had given a commitment to provide 270 New Deal Welfare-to-Work places. Information on the take up of these places is not available centrally.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on by local enterprise councils under the New Deal arrangements. [60414]

Mr. Macdonald: I understand that by 31 October 7 persons had been taken on by Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and their networks of local enterprise under the New Deal arrangements, a further 3 are in the process of being recruited and at present 8 more are under consideration for future posts.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many young people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60371]

Mr. Dewar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today, *Official Report*, column *755*, by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment with responsibility for lifelong learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie).

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60520]

Mr. Dewar: NDPBs are encouraged to participate as employers in the New Deal. Information on the numbers of people taken under the New Deal by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

Police Officers

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police officers *(a)* were recruited, *(b)* retired, *(c)* were dismissed and *(d)* resigned, in total and as a percentage, per police force in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [60479]

Mr. McLeish: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Prisoners

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the percentage of prisoners who have *(a)* drug and *(b)* mental health problems; and if he will make a statement. [60448]

Mr. McLeish: This information is not readily available. However, in the year 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998, from 7,070 samples tested under the mandatory drug testing programme, 29 per cent. of prisoners tested positive.

The rate of psychological disturbance in the prison population is not clear but research suggests that, excluding drug dependence, alcohol dependence and personality disorder, it is estimated to be twice as high as in the general population.

The following is a summary of information contained in the Third Prison Survey, relating to drug and mental health problems, which was published earlier this year:

(a) 44 per cent. of prisoners reported that they had used drugs in prison at some point during the past 6 months and 5 per cent. reported injecting drugs during the same period: and

(b) 32 per cent. of prisoners reported feelings of depression "fairly often" or "very often" and 9 per cent. reported experience of suicidal thoughts with similar frequency in the past 6 months.

Conviction Statistics

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what the total number of convictions was in each category of crime, in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [60451]

(2) what were the *(a)* conviction and *(b)* clear up rates for each category of crime and in total in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [60480]

Mr. McLeish: Information for the latest 3 years for which complete data are available is given in the table.

Clear up rates for crimes and persons with a charge proved by main crime in courts in Scotland, 1994–1996 [1]

	Clear up rates[2]			*Persons with a main charge proved*					
				Number			*Percentage of persons proceeded against*		
Type of crime	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Total crimes	34	35	37	53,425	52,318	51,704	83	82	81
Non-sexual crimes of violence	64	65	67	3,588	3,655	4,303	73	74	75
Indecency	75	74	76	1,427	1,306	979	90	90	85
Dishonesty	28	28	30	31,303	29,531	28,094	85	84	83
Fire-raising and vandalism	20	21	21	4,781	4,878	5,176	85	84	84
Other crimes[3]	100	100	99	12,326	12,948	13,152	82	81	76

[1] Statistics dealing with court proceedings and recorded crimes are not directly comparable. A person may be proceeded against for more than one offence and it is also possible that the offence recorded by the police may be altered as a result of the judicial proceedings. In some cases the year recorded in the recorded crime statistics may not be the same as the court proceedings.
[2] Crime cleared up by the eight Scottish police forces.
[3] Most crimes in this category are cleared up immediately because the offender is caught in the act, eg possession of drugs.

Police (Expenditure)

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of police force expenditure is accounted for by labour costs. [60450]

Mr. McLeish: In 1997–98 staff costs accounted for 88 per cent. of police forces' expenditure.

Prison Populations

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the current prison population per capita is in Scotland; what the comparable figures are in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* the Republic of Ireland and *(e)* the United States of America; what is the OECD average; and if he will make a statement. [60449]

Mr. McLeish: The available information is provided in the table. An average figure for OECD countries is not available: comparisons between different jurisdictions have to be treated with caution because of the differences in definitions and recording methods used.

Prison population and rate per 100,000 population by country as at 1 September 1997

Country	*Number*	*Rate per 100,000 population*[1]
Scotland[2]	6,082	119
England and Wales[3,4]	61,940	120
France[5]	54,442	90
Germany[6]	71,047	87
Ireland (Eire)	2,424	67
USA	1,725,842	645

[1] Based on estimates of national population
[2] Average daily population for September 1997
[3] At 31 August 1997
[4] Includes prisoners held in police cells
[5] Metropolitan and overseas departments
[6] Data relate to 1996
[7] At 30 June 1997

Police Force Structures

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the aims and remit of the proposed review of police force structures in Scotland. [60447]

Mr. McLeish: When my right hon. Friend announced earlier this year that there was to be a review, he made it clear that the aim was to provide the Scottish Parliament with information on which to make a sound decision on whether the current number of forces in Scotland is right for the future. The process will involve a period of information gathering on the financial costs and benefits of a change in the number of forces. This will be followed by the issue of a consultation document which will allow all interested parties to give their views on the issue. The results of the consultation will be made available to the Scottish Parliament.

Re-offending Rates

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures for the re-offending rates, broken down by age group, following *(a)* custodial sentences, *(b)* community sentences and *(c)* fines, in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [60452]

Mr. McLeish: The available information is given in the table. The analysis provides figures on the percentage of individuals sentenced in 1993 who were re-convicted within one, two and three years of the date of sentence, by the type of sentence passed and by the age of the offender at the time of sentence. Convictions for most motoring offences and for some relatively minor statutory offences are excluded. The database does not hold information on the date of release from custody. Re-convictions may therefore include convictions for other crimes committed prior to the date of sentence, thus over-stating the actual rate of re-conviction.

Percentage of offenders sentenced in 1993 for a crime, breach of the peace or assault who were reconvicted within 3 years of sentence date, by first sentence imposed and age in 1993

Type of first sentence in 1993 by age	*Total number of offenders*	*Number of years since first sentenced in 1993*		
		One	*Two*	*Three*
Aged under 21				
Custody	1,166	63	75	79
Community Service Order	929	56	68	74
Probation	1,020	65	76	81
Monetary	9,159	41	53	60
Other	3,006	33	46	53
Total	15,280	43	56	63
Aged 21–30				
Custody	2,858	56	69	75
Community Service Order	1,203	35	47	55
Probation	1,011	51	64	70
Monetary	15,557	31	42	49
Other	3,017	23	33	40
Total	23,646	34	46	52
Aged over 30				
Custody	1,359	45	54	59
Community Service Order	525	23	34	41
Probation	592	30	40	45
Monetary	10,218	23	33	39
Other	3,056	17	25	30
Total	15,750	24	34	40
All ages[1]				
Custody	5,383	55	66	72
Community Service Order	2,657	40	52	59
Probation	2,623	52	63	69
Monetary	34,936	31	43	49
Other	9,079	24	35	41
Total	54,678	34	45	51

[1] Includes 2 persons with age not known.

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the impact on employment of his proposals for privatisation of North Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire DLOs. [60849]

Mr. McLeish: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about social inclusion and active citizenship in respect of community learning plans. [60851]

Mrs. Liddell: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

School Exclusions (Drug Offences)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his policy on school exclusions in respect of drug offences. [60852]

Mrs. Liddell: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Housing

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many houses and flats were available for rent from *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* housing associations in (i) 1978 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [60745]

Mr. Macdonald: I shall write to my hon. Friend and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the methodology employed by officials in calculating the figures which he has released indicating an excess of Government spending over revenue raised in Scotland. [60669]

Mr. Dewar: The methodology, which is unchanged from previous years, is described in Appendices A and B of the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1996–1997" report.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement about the proposals submitted by health boards and trusts for the further reduction of waiting lists in Scotland; [60667]

(2) if he will make a statement about the number of patients currently awaiting a first appointment with a consultant in Scotland. [60665]

Mr. Galbraith: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the extra funding announced for the Scottish Ambulance Service will be spent. [60666]

Mr. Galbraith: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

A80

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his current plans are for the A80 road between Glasgow and Stirling. [60796]

Mr. Macdonald: Options for upgrading the A80 to motorway standard are being analysed within the Strategic Roads Review.

PFI Contracts

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of PFI contracts in which the Government are engaged in Scotland and the annual expenditure to service each of these, over the full term of the contracts in cash and real terms. [60797]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Local Authority Housing Debt

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount of local authority housing debt in Scotland; and what would be the cost of redeeming that debt at the present day. [60798]

Mr. Macdonald: At 1 April 1998, local authority housing debt was estimated at £3.9 billion. An estimate of the cost of redeeming the debt could be made only at disproportionate cost, since it would require detailed discussions with all authorities about their debt portfolios.

Government Expenditure and Revenue Report

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many copies of the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland report have been printed for each edition since 1992; how many have been distributed for each edition; and what was the cost of publication for each edition. [60799]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Civil Servants (Media Quotations)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many specific quotations have been attributed in the Scottish media to Scottish Office central administration civil servants since January. [60800]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will appoint a representative of the Church of Scotland to the Scottish Parliament Consultative Steering Group. [60670]

Mr. McLeish: The Consultative Steering Group has been meeting since January this year and will make its final report to the Secretary of State for Scotland by the end of this year. We have no plans to appoint any further members to the Group. The Church of Scotland took the opportunity to make its views known to CSG in response to the Group's extensive consultation exercise.

HEALTH

Clinical Perfusionists

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to regulate clinical perfusionists. [60496]

Mr. Milburn: Proposals for state registration are a matter for the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine.

Chiropody

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to update the regulatory framework for the chiropody profession. [60517]

Mr. Hutton: We intend to bring forward for consultation proposals for legislation to replace the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960, which regulates nine professions including chiropody.

Car Park Charges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to require health authorities and trusts to consult widely on proposals to introduce car park charges. [60516]

Mr. Milburn: Guidance on the implementation of car parking charges was issued to all trusts in 1996. The guidance envisages trusts seeking the views of staff and other interested parties during the development of its plans. It advises trusts that a typical consultation will include seeking the views of local health authorities, general practitioners, staff representative groups and Community Health Councils.

Value Added Tax Order

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *561*, concerning VAT Order SI 1997/2744, if he will make a statement on the effects of the VAT Order indicating when his officials will conclude their work on the administrative procedure. [60515]

Mr. Milburn: Treasury officials have notified us this week that they have concluded their work on the administrative procedure to ameliorate the effect of the Value Added Tax Order on the supply of certain renal and cancer drugs.

The position on the supply of pharmaceutical products by retail pharmacists is rather more complicated and some legal issues are still being examined.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *561*, concerning VAT Order SI 1997/2744, if incontinence supplies are the subject of discussions with Treasury officials in the same way as certain renal and cancer drugs. [60514]

Mr. Milburn: Incontinence pads are no longer the subject of discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury officials.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by each of the health trusts in England; [60532]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by each of the health authorities in England. [60533]

Mr. Milburn: We are committed to ensuring that this important strand of government social policy is a success and to this end we are looking to the National Health Service to provide at least 1,000 job opportunities overall to New Deal candidates. We have not set a minimum target for each organisation and we are aware that presently 260 NHS organisations have signed employer agreements. Most recent figures collected by the Department show that at the end of October there were 897 health authority and trusts vacancies registered with the Employment Services.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many people in each health region are currently waiting for an appointment with a consultant following referral by a general practitioner; if he will provide a breakdown of the length of time for which those people *(a)* have already waited and *(b)* are expected to wait; and if he will list for each region the waiting time being issued to new entrants to this waiting list for (i) orthopaedic consultants and (ii) consultants in all other major specialties. [60538]

Mr. Milburn: The total number of patients waiting for a first appointment with a consultant following referral by a general practitioner is not collected centrally. The available information is shown in the tables.

Table 1: Patients waiting over 13 and 26 weeks for a first outpatient appointment following GP referral, at end June 1998, by region—all specialties

Region	Number who had been waiting over 13 weeks	Of which: those who had been waiting over 26 weeks
Northern and Yorkshire	44,640	14,573
Trent	47,533	17,509
Anglia and Oxford	38,829	10,749
North Thames	65,243	16,018
South Thames	36,864	9,015
South and West	48,320	16,912
West Midlands	34,608	7,706
North West	61,660	16,202
England	377,697	108,684

Table 2: Trauma and orthopaedic patients waiting over 13 and 26 weeks for a first outpatient appointment following GP referral, at end June 1998, by region

Region	Number who had been waiting over 13 weeks	Of which: those who had been waiting over 26 weeks
Northern and Yorkshire	12,603	5,145
Trent	10,336	3,941
Anglia and Oxford	10,132	3,822
North Thames	10,462	2,541
South Thames	5,929	1,352
South and West	12,500	4,907
West Midlands	7,233	1,695
North West	13,562	4,004
England	82,757	27,407

Table 3: Patients seen at first outpatient appointments within 13 and 26 weeks at the quarter ending June 1998, following referral by a GP, by region—all specialties

Region	Percentage of patients seen within 13 weeks of GP referral	Percentage of patients seen within 26 weeks of GP referral
Northern and Yorkshire	83	96
Trent	83	95
Anglia and Oxford	80	95
North Thames	80	96
South Thames	84	97
South and West	83	96
West Midlands	83	96
North West	81	96
England	82	96

Table 4: Patients seen at first outpatient appointment within 13 and 26 weeks by trauma and orthopaedic consultants in the quarter ending June 1998, by region

Region	Percentage of patients seen within 13 weeks of GP referral	Percentage of patients seen within 26 weeks of GP referral
Northern and Yorkshire	61	86
Trent	64	87
Anglia and Oxford	63	86
North Thames	62	92
South Thames	75	94
South and West	64	86
West Midlands	73	91
North West	66	91
England	66	89

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55552]

Ms Jowell: There have been no occasions where a Department of Health Minister has used an RAF or privately chartered aircraft during the period 1 May 1996 to 1 May 1997 or since 1 May 1997.

Bournewood Judgment

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Bournewood Judgment. [60293]

Mr. Hutton: Preliminary guidance on the implications of the judgment was given in a circular issued by the National Health Service Executive on 10 July (Health Services Circular 1998/999). Further guidance will be included in a revised Code of Practice on the Mental Health Act 1983 which, subject to the approval of the House, will be published early next year. The wider implications of the judgments of the Law Lords are being considered in the context of development of Government policy on mental incapacity more generally, and by the expert group which has been set up to advise the Government on the review of the Mental Health Act.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *179*, (1) if he will estimate the cost of providing a hardship fund for people with haemophilia infected with the hepatitis C virus through contaminated blood products similar to the scheme operating for those with HIV infection; [59883]

(2) how many haemophilia patients were infected with hepatitis C virus through their NHS treatment prior to 1985; how many are currently awaiting liver transplants as a result of the disease; how many are currently undergoing NHS treatment; and how many have died as a result of liver diseases; [59848]

(3) what is the current medical *(a)* evidence and *(b)* advice on the transmission of Hepatitis C virus (i) between partners and (ii) between parents and children. [59843]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 18 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *679–99*.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *179*, what representations he has received from the Haemophilia Society concerning abuse and discrimination against hepatitis C infected people. [59884]

Mr. Hutton: The Chairman of the Haemophilia Society wrote on 31 July to say that he was aware of difficulties in some cases and of concern among those infected. Some individuals have expressed similar concerns in correspondence. For young people in particular we are funding the Society's youth information and support project aimed at helping them improve their education and employment prospects.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *179*, what steps he has taken to monitor the take-up of benefits by people infected with the hepatitis C virus through contaminated blood products; and what assessment he has made of the additional costs of care for such people and the loss of income from reduced availability for work. [59882]

Mr. Hutton: There is no specific monitoring of benefit claims from people infected with hepatitis C through blood products. Their entitlement to assistance under the benefits system is assessed in the same way as for other people. Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance, for example, does not depend on whether a claimant is working, or on specific disabling conditions, but on the effects of a person's disability on their care and/or mobility needs.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which EU countries provide financial help for haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C virus through treatment products. [59846]

Mr. Hutton: I will write to the hon. Member.

CS Spray

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the research by the Bethlem and Maudsley NHS trust on the use of CS spray by the police on people with mental health problems; and what action has been taken following this assessment. [60315]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not made any assessment of this research. However, we understand that the Mental Health Act Commission has written to the President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists suggesting that the College should convene a meeting of the relevant interests with a view to deciding what, if any, action is needed to address the questions raised by the survey.

Asylum Seekers (Birmingham)

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about Birmingham City Council's method of delivering groceries to asylum seekers in Birmingham. [60247]

Mr. Hutton: It is for the individual local authorities to decide on the level and most cost-effective type of service it provides to adult asylum seekers having regard to the needs of the asylum seekers concerned.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the conclusions of Taskforce 2000 published on 11 November in respect of his Department's most recent quarterly return on plans and progress towards Year 2000 readiness. [60220]

Mr. Milburn: The Taskforce 2000 report provided a comprehensive assessment of the state of preparedness of the Department and its agencies as it existed at the end of the summer. We welcome any independent analysis of our published returns as a double check of analysis done in-house.

The Medicines Control Agency are well aware of the problems identified and were already acting on these prior to the publication of the Taskforce 2000 report.

The figures contained in the last published quarterly review for the National Health Services Estates Agency are open to different interpretations, but were classified as 'green' (low risk) by the Central Information Technology Unit in the Cabinet Office.

The results of the next quarterly review will be announced shortly in the House and copies of the Department's and its agencies' latest quarterly returns will be available in the Library and published on the Internet.

Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of Opportunities For Volunteering grants for 1999–2000. [60401]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme is an important part of our overall support for volunteering in health and personal social services, and will remain so in 1999–2000. During 1999, we will consider the most effective way of developing the Department's strategy to promote volunteering. This will be done in consultation with the leading national voluntary organisations who are involved in the Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme. Pending the development of that strategy, we have ensured that grant commitments under the scheme for 1999–2000 will be fully met.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in connection with Opportunities For Volunteering grants for 1999–2000. [60402]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has received 13 letters about the level of funding for the Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme in 1999–2000. In addition, Departmental officials have been in discussion about funding for 1999–2000 with representatives of the leading voluntary organisations involved in the scheme. I am to meet representatives of those organisations on 24 November to discuss the scheme in the wider context of developing the Department's overall strategy to promote volunteering.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many organisations currently receive Opportunities For Volunteering grants; for how long each organisation has received a grant; and when is the planned end of each organisation's funding from such grants. [60403]

Mr. Hutton: Seventeen leading national voluntary organisations receive Opportunities for Volunteering grants directly from the Department. Currently they use that funding to support 526 local volunteering organisations and projects through grants for up to three years. 176 of those local grants are due to end in 1999–2000, and a further 121 in 2000–01.

Irlen's Syndrome

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation his Department has made of treatments for Irlen's syndrome. [60600]

Mr. Milburn: No evaluation of treatments for Irlen's Syndrome has been carried out by the Department.

Incentive Project Service Payments

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many administrative personnel working for the Hillingdon Health Authority, West Hertfordshire Health Authority, North Thames Regional Executive of the NHS and the Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust are subject to incentive project reviews; and what posts they hold. [60357]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 18 November 1998]:* Information is not centrally held on individual payments to National Health Service staff or the number of NHS staff who could benefit from them.

Guidance on Department of Health pay arrangements is set out in the booklet "DH Pay Arrangements—Guidance for Managers and Staff". All staff at NHS Executive Regional Offices receive performance related pay, except Senior Civil Servants, who have separate arrangements. In North Thames Regional Office, for 1997–98, 110 members of staff received pay awards.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Plutonium Discharges

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the plutonium reprocessed from spent fuel discharged from BNFL's Calder Hall and Chapel Cross reactors is under safeguards. [60778]

Mrs. Roche: All plutonium recovered from the reprocessing of spent fuel from the Calder Hall and Chapel Cross reactors since May 1995 is under Euratom safeguards and subject to the terms of the UK/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement. The process of historical accounting announced as part of the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) will cover all plutonium recovered from the reprocessing of fuel from the Calder Hall and Chapel Cross reactors, irrespective of whether it has been placed under international safeguards or not.

Defence Exports

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list the defence equipment exported to Saudi Arabia by Allivane under export licence 1A/4650/87; [60812]

(2) if export licence number 1A/4650/87 was granted to Allivane for the supply of defence equipment to Saudi Arabia. [60813]

Mrs. Roche: Chapter 6, E6.3—6.15 of Sir Richard Scott's 'Report of the Inquiry into the Export of Defence Equipment and Dual-Use Goods to Iraq and Related Prosecutions' recorded that export licence number 1A/4650/87 was issued on 17 June 1987 to Allivane International Limited, and covered the export to the Ministry of Defence and Aviation in Saudi Arabia, of 15,000 rounds of 155mm extended range base-bleed HE ammunition. Information on exports under this licence is also set out there.

Electronic Commerce

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce measures to promote the growth of electronic commerce, including digital purchases, with particular reference to software, video, audio and intellectual property. [60679]

Mrs. Roche: I will set out my proposals, to make the UK the best environment in the world to trade electronically, in the Competitiveness White Paper to be published shortly.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will establish a development corporation to encourage Internet-based trading companies, including those facilitating digital purchases, to locate in the UK. [60678]

Mrs. Roche: The Invest in Britain Bureau—which promotes the whole of the UK as the number one location for inward investment in Europe—is giving special emphasis to identifying key knowledge-driven potential investors from around the world, including Internet technology producers and trading companies. Cisco systems, one of the world's leading Internet technology companies, announced only a few weeks ago that it will set up a new research and design centre in the UK and today announced it is extending its American Networking Academy Programme to the UK to certify schools in computer networking and Internet applications.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings he has had since his appointment with *(a)* British Airways, *(b)* British Airports Authority, *(c)* British Telecom, *(d)* British Aerospace, *(e)* the Ford Motor Company, *(f)* GEC, *(g)* Camelot, *(h)* Thames Water, *(i)* BSkyB, *(j)* Marks and Spencer, *(k)* McDonalds and *(l)* Tesco; and if civil servants were present. [60432]

Mr. Mandelson: Since my appointment as Secretary of State I have had meetings with the named companies on the following occasions. Civil Servants were present at all the meetings.

Date	*Company*
7 September 1998	British Aerospace
21 October 1998	British Aerospace
26 October 1998	British Aerospace
30 October 1998	British Telecom
14 November 1998	British Aerospace

Multinational Companies

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government plans to take to strengthen through international forums the obligations and responsibilities of multinational companies in respect of *(a)* environmental and *(b)* labour standards. [60663]

Mr. Mandelson: The Government are working to encourage a positive response by United Kingdom companies to calls for socially and environmentally responsible behaviour. We are also working with our OECD counterparts to review the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises, which set down the firm expectation of how member Governments expect their companies to behave in the areas covered by the Guidelines. As part of this review, we will be calling for the principles of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work to be incorporated into the Guidelines.

Multinational Agreement on Investment

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those companies which have indicated to the Government a desire to see a multinational agreement on investment in place. [60606]

Mr. Wilson: The Government receive regular representations from UK companies, in the course of our normal day-to-day contacts, in favour of further trade and investment liberalisation. The CBI has made specific representations in favour of a multilateral framework of investment rules.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 585, on European structural funds, if he will make a statement on the negotiations within the European Union regarding the European structural funds regime for the West Midlands Region. [60251]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *585*.

Millennium Dome (Public Toilets)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provision there will be in the Millennium Dome for public toilets for women and men, including disabled people, and for babies' changing and feeding rooms. [60676]

Mr. Mandelson: The Millennium Dome site will have 608 WCs and 247 urinals. Toilet facilities for people with disabilities will be available at each of the service cores in the Dome and elsewhere around the site. The site will also offer adequate facilities for changing and feeding young children.

Trades Union Recognition

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his proposals for trades union recognition in workplaces are conditional upon those employees indicating separately that they wish the unions to represent them in collective bargaining with management. [60380]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government intend that there will be three gateways to union recognition: by voluntary agreement, as at present, which is likely to be the most frequently used route; automatically, where a union or group of unions has more than 50% of the relevant employees as members; or by a majority and at least 40% or those eligible to vote supporting recognition in a ballot. The Government will announce in due course detailed measures to give effect to these proposals.

Fairness at Work

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library copies of the submissions on the Fairness at Work White Paper from companies and business organisations. [60762]

Mr. Mandelson: The White Paper on Fairness at Work did not say that responses would be made public. Some respondents may have intended their responses to be confidential and it would be wrong to disclose them without permission. However, we have already placed a list of all respondents in the Library so that hon. Members may approach them direct to ask whether they are prepared to release their responses.

Multinational Enterprise Guidelines

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current review of the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises. [60587]

Mr. Wilson: The OECD Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises (CIME) agreed at its meeting in June that the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises should be renewed. The Government, together with the majority of the other delegates, argued that this review should be completed in one year. We are strongly committed to the Guidelines, which set out our firm expectation of how UK companies should act in the areas that they cover. We are in the

process of developing our detailed objectives for the review, in discussion with business, trade unions and other interested parties.

Oil Exploration (Atlantic Frontier)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the effect of prevailing weather conditions in the Atlantic Frontier on oil exploration activities. [60806]

Mr. Battle: I am unaware of any specific representations about this matter.

Oil Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures he has in place to ensure continuous risk assessment and monitoring to prevent serious oil pollution incidents in UK waters arising from oil extraction activities; and if he will make a statement. [60808]

Mr. Battle: The recently implemented Merchant Shipping (Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation Convention) Regulations 1998 require that for each installation involved in oil extraction activities a plan is submitted, which includes an assessment of the risk of spills. These plans must be reviewed every 5 years, or earlier if there are any major changes which may affect the validity or effectiveness of the plan.

DTI inspectors travel offshore to inspect installations on a regular basis to ensure that operators are in compliance with any legislative requirements. In addition, all offshore installations are routinely over-flown by the anti-pollution surveillance aircraft. Operators are obliged by law to report all spills of oil resulting from their activities.

New Deal

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the number of people taken on under the New Deal arrangements by non-departmental bodies in receipt of financial support from his Department. [60518]

Dr. Howells: This Department provides financial support to 37 Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) which are encouraged to participate as employers in the New Deal. Information on the number of people taken under the New Deal by NDPBs is not held centrally.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people within his Department have been employed under the New Deal arrangements. [60387]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today, *Official Report*, column *755*, by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment with responsibility for lifelong learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie).

Environment-friendly Practices

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he proposes to inform businesses of the benefits of implementing environment-friendly practices. [60482]

Mr. Battle: The Department of Trade and Industry actively promotes to business the message that improved environmental performance enhances competitiveness. The main vehicle for this is the Environment Technology Best Practice Programme which is run in partnership with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. This programme produces high quality technical advice in relation to specific industrial sectors along with generic advice on issues such as waste minimisation. It also runs a Helpline which provides advice on environmental problems faced by business. This programme complements the work done—again in collaboration with DETR—by the Joint Environmental Markets Unit on promoting the capabilities of the UK Environment industry.

Apart from the programme, advice is made available on specific issues arising from current or forthcoming legislation and policy initiatives: such as guidance on producer responsibility and recycling and on ozone depleting substances. Moreover, the Department works in partnership with national organisations in promoting the business case for environmental performance and funds, through the Government Offices in the regions, local events and projects to raise business awareness of the issues and the services offered by the Department.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him or his predecessor and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53839]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Office Furniture

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received relating to the impact on exceptionally tall people of the most recent CEN recommendations concerning the standard height of office furniture. [59605]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Two European office furniture standards, covering office tables, desks and work chair dimensions, are currently being developed by the European Standardisation Committee (CEN) TC 207, Sub-Committee 3, Office Furniture, on which the British office furniture industry is represented. The draft standards are based on measurements of the European population. In nearly all cases the draft standards are identical to those in existing British Standards; where they differ, they are to the advantage of taller people in the UK population.

I have not received any representations to date relating to the draft European standards.

Millennium Experience

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on the rights

which have been acquired by sponsors of the Millennium Experience over the names and contents of its zones and facilities; [60318]

(2) if he will publish details of sponsorship agreements between the New Millennium Experience Company and BSkyB. [60320]

Mr. Mandelson: Contractual arrangements between the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) and individual sponsors are currently under discussion. These discussions are commercially confidential. To reveal details of these contracts at this stage would damage the NMEC's negotiating position with potential sponsors and contractors.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the ticketing arrangements and charges for events in the theatre/cinema complex on the Millennium site. [60319]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is responsible for ticketing arrangements across the whole Millennium Experience project—including charges. Ticketing arrangements will be finalised in line with the NMEC's timetable as set out in their Corporate Plan for 1997/98–2000/01, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions he has been present during discussion of sponsorship by BSkyB of the Millennium Experience. [60321]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), *Official Report*, 27 October 1998, columns *130*.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if information about the euro will be included in the Transaction Zone of the Millennium Experience. [60087]

Mr. Mandelson: Development of the detailed content of the Transaction Zone is progressing to timetable. The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is currently considering with the zone's designers a range of issues, including how information about different currencies might best be presented.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the agreements that the Millennium Experience Company has entered into with foreign financial backers which will exclude the display of examples of British culture and industry in the Millennium Dome. [60754]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has entered into no such agreements.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list the guidelines used by the Millennium Experience Company in determining *(a)* approaches to potential financial backers of the Millennium Dome displays, *(b)* acceptance of financial backing for the Millennium Dome displays, *(c)* the relevance of proposed displays put forward by potential financial backers to British culture and industry and *(d)* preferences among proposals from potential financial backers which promote exclusively British culture and industry; [60747]

(2) what proposals the Millennium Experience Company has to ensure that private sector financial backing does not mitigate against the Millennium Dome being a showcase for British culture and industry. [60755]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the Millennium Experience as the focus for the nation's millennium celebrations. To achieve that the NMEC, in its discussions with private sponsors, retains the overall control of the contents of the exhibit zones within the Millennium Dome.

I am confident that the Millennium Experience will be a symbol of British confidence; a beacon for British creativity; and a fantastic day out for all who visit.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what instructions he has given to the Millennium Experience Company on exclusive franchising arrangements with private sector financial backers that would prevent the display of examples of British culture and industry. [60753]

Mr. Mandelson: I have given no such instructions.

Customer Trolleys

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make regulations to ensure that retail outlets which provide trolleys for customers operate a returnable deposit system. [60235]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 17 November 1998]:* Section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 provides local authorities with powers to collect, store and dispose of abandoned trolleys.

Wherever possible they must inform the trolley owner that they have collected a trolley, and if not collected within 6 weeks that they will dispose of it. Local authorities are able to make a charge to the trolley owner which is sufficient to cover the costs of collection, storage and disposal.

The Government prefer local authorities to enter into voluntary arrangements with trolley owners. If local traders are unwilling to co-operate then local authorities may decide to use the S.99 powers.

I have no plans to make any regulations in this area.

Wellcome Trust Planning Application

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will publish the submissions made by his Department to *(a)* the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and *(b)* the Inspector in respect of a planning application by the Wellcome Trust at Hinxton in South Cambridgeshire; [55424]

(2) when he plans to provide a substantive reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire on 3 September (ref. 55424) on a planning application by the Wellcome Trust. [60456]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* My Department has not made any submissions to either the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions or to the Inspector in respect of the Wellcome Trust planning application at Hinxton, Cambridgeshire.

Following the decision by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to reopen the inquiry, my Department will be considering whether to submit views to the Inspector.

Royal Observatory

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations he has had with the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council concerning the winding up of the Royal Observatory. [60101]

Mr. Battle: My noble Friend the Minister for Science meets the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC) from time to time to discuss a range of issues. However, it is for the Council to determine the specific priorities for funding within a specific area.

PPARC decided to concentrate the work it funds at the RGO, which is based at Cambridge and the Royal Observatory Edinburgh (ROE) in a new UK Astronomy Technology Centre (UKATC) at Edinburgh. This decision was a unanimous one by the Council of PPARC. It will allow PPARC to reorganise the Royal Observatories in the way which best meets their scientific requirements. A substantial amount of money, equivalent to 20 per cent. of the budget for astronomy, is being released as a result of this decision which will be reinvested in their scientific programmes.

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [55995]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 22 October 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 on which a Minister in his Department has used *(a)* an aircraft belonging to the RAF and *(b)* a privately chartered aircraft together with (i) details of the take-off and destination points, (ii) ground waiting time, (iii) dates of departure and return, (iv) purpose of the trip, (v) cost of the trip to his Department and (vi) details of people accompanying the Minister, indicating the total costs of all such travel borne by his Department (1) since 1 May 1997 and (2) between 1 May 1996 and 1 May 1997. [55559]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* This Question could be answered in full only at disproportionate cost. Ministers are required under the terms of the Ministerial Code always to make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The rules on travel for Ministers are the same as those that applied under the previous Administration.

Between 2 May and 30 September 1998, Ministers in this Department have used RAF aircraft/private charter aircraft on the following occasions:

Date	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Numbers accompanying Minister*
January 1998	Bonn	European Aerospace and Defence Restructuring meeting	2
February 1998	Liverpool to London	Visit to Liverpool	1
February 1998	Madrid-Lisbon	European Aerospace and Defence Restructuring meeting and EU Presidency meeting	5
May 1998	Berlin	Airbus Ministers meeting and Air Show	3
May 1998	Paris	WTO Conference	3
June 1998	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council	1
July 1998	Paris	European Aerospace and Defence Restructuring meeting and Air Show	2
July 1998	Berlin	European Solutions to German Challenges Conferences	2
July 1998	Swakupmond to Windhoek	Meeting with South African Minister of Trade	1
September 1998	Farnborough	Farnborough Air Show	1

The average cost of the flights taken to meet these trips for the 17 months between May 1997 and September 1998 is £2,204 compared to an average cost of £6,049 under the last year of the previous Administration.

Special Advisers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list his special advisers indicating their *(a)* remuneration, *(b)* official accommodation, *(c)* staff and other resources allocated to them, *(d)* age, *(e)* previous employment, *(f)* subjects on which they advise and *(g)* restrictions imposed on access to official papers and meetings. [56661]

Mr. Mandelson: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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SESSION 1997–98

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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